148 PAGES!

GOLDEN JOYSTICK PRESENTS

ASSASSIN'S CREED

ULTIMATE SERIES GUIDE: 2007 - 2015

- Every Assassin Ever: 80+ hooded heroes uncovered over 20 games
- Discover rare Creed art and merchandise + where you can buy it
- Assassin's Creed movie investigated: is this the first great video game film?

FUTURE

GOLDEN JOYSTICK PRESENTS

NOTHING IS TRUE, EVERYTHING IS PERMITTED

Hello and welcome to Golden Joystick Presents... Assassin's Creed. With the series in its eighth year, and Syndicate its twentieth game, there's never been a better time to look back and celebrate how far the AC universe has come. Over the next 140+ pages you'll get an in-depth look at the latest game, as we delve into the secrets of Syndicate, chat to the people who created it, and take a look at the characters and historical figures that bring it to life.

After that, a glance back at the entire back catalogue of Assassin's Creed games, a deep-dive into the weighty extended universe, and look at how elements of the franchise have developed over the years, like the trademark hidden blade and the sinister Templar Order.

And it's not just about the games, either. There are features on the cosplayers who bring Assassin's Creed to life in the real world, the art that celebrates the stories, and the lovely merchandise you can pick up to show your love for the 'Creed. Finally, we take a sideways look at the series and investigate the secrets, Easter eggs, and bizarre hidden gems that make the games so rich and enjoyable. It's a true celebration of all things Assassin's Creed and I know you're going to love it.

Enjoy!

Andy

Andy Hartup,
Editor Golden Joystick Presents... Assassin's Creed

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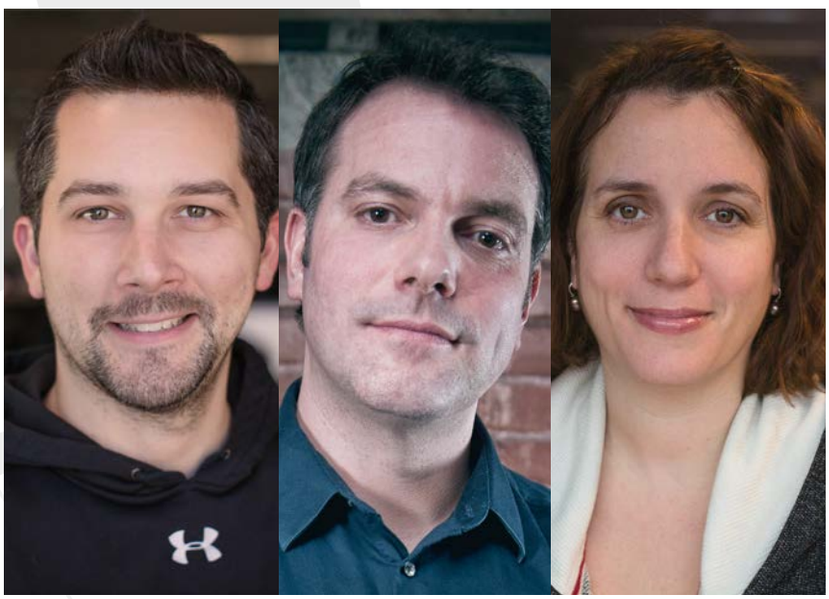

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We speak exclusively to the creators of AC Syndicate

GOLDEN JOYSTICK PRESENTS

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EXPOSING THE SYNDICATE

Louise Blain gives her definitive verdict on Assassin's Creed Syndicate having stabbed every enemy, looted every chest, and recruited every Victorian street urchin

Yes, it's been a long time coming but we're finally here: Victorian London. And it's a monster. Twins, gangs, blades and Templars – Syndicate offers up some of the most joyful Creed moments in years. The glee of fast travelling to the mast of a ship in the middle of the Thames to watch smoke puff from steamboats as they make their way happily down the river. The fun of hurtling up a chimney with the rope launcher in Lambeth only to hear a train and catch a glimpse of it as it chugs across a bridge between buildings in the distance. There's a simple, childlike joy in just watching the pieces of Syndicate's London work together like a giant model set and then a deep satisfaction as you jump in and cause absolute chaos. Add in a rollicking Creed yarn and two genuinely entertaining Assassins and this is the most assured entry in the series since Black Flag. Oh, and London? It's spectacular.

We've seen a lot of men in hoods by now; Jacob Frye has all the hallmarks of a stereotypical Assassin, with his rugged jaw and fashionable stubble... but despite this familiarity, he and his sister Evie are instantly likeable. A snappy script and physical comedy makes it genuinely pleasurable to spend time in their company. In fact, you'll probably laugh out loud at the series for the first time since Mario Auditore uttered his infamous introductory line "It's-a me... Mario". While Jacob is a lovable buffoon obsessed with causing carnage, Evie is sarcastic and damning of her brother's disregard for the rules of the Brotherhood, but equally likeable and sweet. Each has their own story missions – Jacob is knuckling down on Templars while Evie hunts for a Piece Of Eden – but when it comes to the open-world you can choose who you want to explore as.

> SYNDICATE NOT ONLY DELIVERS A SATISFYING TALE, BUT IT DOES SO IN ONE OF THE BEST SETTINGS EVER

Switching between the two mid-exploration always comes with a neat little reaction. "Finally, I was getting bored," quips Jacob when you eventually relinquish Evie's extra

ABOVE
Meet Robert Topping and he'll invite you to fight clubs. Do accept

LEFT
There are plenty of unique kill opportunities during main missions

LEFT BELOW
Story missions need to be played by the appropriate character

throwing knives and charming company. Helpfully, while both have their own individual skill trees, the pair share money and gear and every 1000XP you earn will net both a skill point to spend whether you're playing as them or not. While Evie is tipped slightly more towards stealth, and Jacob brute force, there's no stopping either being stealthy or deadly with the new close combat update.

KNIFE TO SEE YOU

Cane swords, knuckle dusters and a nasty knife known as the Kukri are now your Assassin weapons of choice. These complement the hidden blade nicely and mean combat is much more, err, snuggly than before. While it's still a case of countering enemy swings and breaking defence, fisticuffs have a more satisfying feel than in Unity. There still isn't the smoothness of Batman but transitioning between opponents feels solid, and sending multiple enemies into a stooping, zombie-like state will net the most inventive multi-slaughter >>

EIGHT WAYS TO GET AHEAD IN SYNDICATE

1 USE GANG UPGRADES
These should be your first port of call to start improving London. Little Rooks is an especially useful add on as it employs half the kids across London as your pickpockets who'll handily turn over a stack of money and craftables. Just don't ask where that £5K came from.

2 LISTEN FOR MUSIC
Amongst the collectibles in the game are beer bottles, pressed flowers, Helix Glitches but also the interesting Precursor Tokens. These are hidden inside music boxes across London that tinkle away happily to let you know where they are so keep an ear out.

3 KEEP EQUIPPING NEW GEAR
Every mission you do will earn you various bits for your Assassins. From belts to gauntlets, these are useful for defense and attack and also make you look pretty dapper too. Head into the menu and make sure you've got the best possible equipment for the job.

4 EXPLORE MEMORIES
AC loves its historical figures and Syndicate is no different. Marx, Dickens, Darwin and even Queen Victoria are awaiting with memory missions for you to go through. It's a nice change of pace and you might even, dare I say it, learn something.

5 DO SOME PENNY DREADFULS
If you're playing on PS4, the Dreadful Crimes missions are based on popular pulp crime fiction from around the time. Use your Eagle Vision to bring up Sherlock style clues and interrogate suspects before deciding on who deserves justice. Well, actual justice. Not just your blade. You murderer.

6 EXPLORE THE THAMES
Not just hella fun to play Assassin Frogger across, the Thames is covered in cargo to steal that comes in useful for weapon crafting and gang upgrades. Those pesky Blighters are also dealing and contraband for you to destroy and earn XP.

7 TALK ABOUT FIGHT CLUB
Head to see Robert Topping and Ned Wynert from the get go (R and N on your map) and you'll unlock fight clubs, carriage races and the chance to steal a load of loot from the Blighters. You'll thank me later.

8 GET CRAFTING
Keep up to date with your crafting. If you keep an eye out for gold chests in the world, these can have schematics for better gauntlets and weaponry. Provided you've got the crafting goods, you can create weapons and kit without spending cash on them.

animations I've seen in games. Cane, meet eyeballs, eyeballs, meet cane.

Stealth too has had a major, not to mention welcome, overhaul. No longer mapped to a shoulder button, tapping x/a will switch out your top hat for a hood and put you into a crouch. While in sneak mode, cover is now automatic so you'll finally stick to objects (in a good way this time) and it means infiltration is a far more slick experience. Whether you're entering one of the child liberation missions from a skylight or sneaking into a gang stronghold through a window, this is the first Creed that feels like not getting detected is a real possibility.

Add in the new freedom of movement offered up by the rope launcher and, despite the inevitable descent into chaos at any minute, Jacob and Evie have enough tricks up their sleeves (hello return of the whistle) to make sneaky slaughter an absolute pleasure. There's an increased emphasis on unique kill opportunities, multiple entry points into missions, or the chance to go in all guns blazing – but more importantly, these opportunities are better signposted than ever.

TALK OF THE TOWN

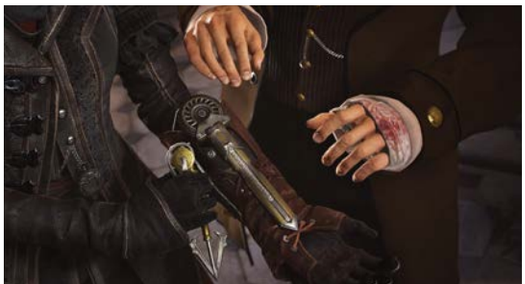
While these main missions see you targeting the pantomime Templar, Crawford Starrick, in the game's finely crafted story, the real fun is in exploring and taking over London itself. Yes there's a lot to do, but it never feels like the map is overwhelming, only that you're going to get distracted on the way to wherever you're going. Spotted your ridiculously cool train hideout chugging on by? Aah, it would be nice to pick up money from the safe... but hold on! Is that a carriage of cargo that needs to be stolen in a mission to net some loyalty points with Rooks member Ned Wynert? Let me just hurtle across the street with my trusty rope launcher. Oh, wait, is that a civilian needing saving? Expect to be late. For pretty much everything.

And then there's the actual city. A sprawling character in itself with unique districts and boroughs, London is beautiful and stretches on forever (well, it's pretty big as game worlds go) as you take in the sights from a viewpoint or clatter over a bridge on a stolen carriage. Add in Austin Wintory's beautiful, ever-changing score and there hasn't been a sense of atmospheric life like this since AC2's Venice. The Thames is a playground of activity and something I could spend this entire review talking about. Teeming with life and industry, hopping from boat to crate to paddle steamer is a genuine rush. Those worried that vehicles would >>

LEFT
As ever, collecting secrets in London leads to unlocking kick-ass robes

BELOW
Freeing children from work houses helps you liberate districts

RIGHT
There's a definite romance thing between Evie and Henry Greem



LEFT
Hopping between carriages, mid-chase, is a simple joy

BELOW
Alexander Graham Bell modifies the Assassin's Gauntlet in Syndicate

SKILL LIST

Jacob and Evie each have their own skill tree which means you can personalise them accordingly. They're mostly the same but with a few tweaks. Evie can carry more more powerful skills such as Evie's Chameleon ability where she can effectively disappear when staying still is 6 skill points, as is Jacob's counter attack that guarantees a headshot so plan accordingly.

be too much for the Creed couldn't be more wrong. Carriages almost sound like an afterthought here but you'll quickly find yourself hijacking one just to have the inevitable fun of ramming enemies dramatically off the road in the Victorian equivalent of Burnout Takedown's destruction sequences. With fewer sparks.

And the bad? Few still play Assassin's Creed for its main missions and – while there's a strong narrative winding its way through the game and a cracker of an ending – Syndicate does little to improve these. Tailing isn't as prevalent as before, and it's made significantly easier by the rope launcher… but it's still a recurring theme and leaves some missions feeling stilted and frustrating. Whereas the game starts with two ultra confident sequences taking clear inspiration from Uncharted and even Tomb Raider, later ones start to feel slow, stuttery, and rote – problems the series has faced for several years now.

It's also worth saying that in my 40-hour gameplay session, I did catch sight of a few bugs but nothing more than you'd expect in such a huge open-world. Perhaps you were hoping to see half of Evie's face or infinite Rapunzel style hair billowing from under Jacob's top hat? Sadly not. Instead I've just the odd broom standing up alone and a few visual hiccups. Not game breaking, but not as polished as, say, Arkham Knight's Gotham.

Syndicate's scale and sense of London being a living city really does compensate for the rough edges, though. Even now, I still have boroughs to liberate and I've only scratched the surface of the memories of Marx, Darwin, Dickens and even Queen Victoria. There's also a wonderful spoilery surprise that I won't reveal which won't just send lore fans into giddy excitement but will be a genuine joy to experience for everyone.

> STEALTH HAS HAD A HUGE OVERHAUL - IT FEELS LIKE NOT GETTING DETECTED IS A REAL POSSIBILITY

Combining both traditional and new Creed stories with its dual narrative, Syndicate not only manages to deliver a cohesive and satisfying tale but it does so within one of the finest settings the series has ever seen. No, it isn't perfect, but with such a beautiful world, a genuinely likeable cast of characters, and many improvements to both stealth and combat this feels like a step in the right direction for Assassin's Creed.

WHO IS... JACOB FRYE?

Meet the all-action co-star of Assassin's Creed Syndicate

The smirking brute with the knuckle-dusters in all of Assassin's Creed Syndicate's promotional art, Jacob is a man who believes he can change the world by putting a few fists in the right faces. However, unlike most Assassins (especially his twin sister, Evie) he prefers to be a free agent of justice – he doesn't care much for the Assassin Order he and Evie were born into, and has been paying lip-service to the Brotherhood's teachings from a young age.

While he did absorb the most basic laws of the Order taught to him by his father, he resented the constraints of his schooling and spent most of his teen years stirring up as much trouble as he could. That turned out to be informative in its own way, as it introduced him to the world of organized crime, though he didn't know how useful that would be until later. It just seemed fun at the time. A rule-breaker by nature, he's all too happy to convince Evie they should ditch their responsibilities in Crawley and head for London in search of something bigger and better than their quaint country town has to offer (though he doesn't have to twist her arm much). His goals: kill Templars and, more importantly, attain personal glory.

That personal glory comes in the founding of his own London street gang, The Rooks. Dubious of his sister's plan to defeat the Templars by stealing a Piece of Eden, he plans to tear the Templar Order down body by body, using his Rooks to kill anyone who claims Templar allegiance. Controlling a gang that size is no mean feat, but Jacob's the man for the job. What he lacks in planning (which is a lot, to his sister's chagrin) he makes up for in charisma.

When he's not busy controlling one of London's most powerful gangs (or sometimes when he is), Jacob is every bit the goofball, treating each new weapon like a toy and poking fun at his too-serious sister as often as he can. That becomes a point of contention for the twins, with Evie certain he isn't taking their duties seriously. Jacob, however, is quick to disagree: he cares about the cause, but prefers decisive action to endless planning and handwringing. Of course, his approach usually ends in a mess that Evie has needs to clean up later, but hey, not *every* time.

WEAPON OF CHOICE

Although Jacob's fond of any piece of weaponry that falls into his twitching hands, he's happiest with the Indian Kukri gifted to him by informant Henry Green. And no wonder - wicked sharp and curved for maximum carnage, the Kukri does all the up-front damage Jacob could ever hope for. Though when in need, he doesn't mind a set of good 'ol fashion knuckle-dusters either. They go well with a good head-butt to the face.

FUN FACT

While Evie can name all the world's greatest Assassins off the top of her head (an Assassin's Creed fan in Assassin's Creed? Meta), Jacob knows basically nothing about the Assassin legacy that precedes him. He doesn't recognize the names Ezio Auditore or Edward Kenway, and more than that, he doesn't care. He wants to live in the here and now - who cares what a bunch of old fogeys did way back when, right?

HISTORICAL BUDDIES

While Jacob and Evie both regularly rub elbows with the likes of Charles Dickens and Alexander Graham Bell (their quest-giver and inventor friends, respectively), Jacob manages to become an errand boy for Charles Darwin all by his lonesome. We won't say too much about how they meet - it's too charming to give it away just like that - but once they do it's clear that they've got a good partnership going based on mutual respect. And the fact that Darwin's to-do list involves blowing a few things up. That definitely gets Jacob's attention.

WHO IS... EVIE FRYE?

You've met her brutal brother... now say hello to the most deadly of the Frye twins

Widely regarded as the best Assassin in London (nobody tell Jacob), Evie is truly and wholly dedicated to the Order, following in the footsteps of her esteemed Assassin father. Even years after his death, she still reveres him and aspires to become a leader and scholar worthy of his legacy. Beginning her Assassin training alongside her brother at the age of six, Evie soaked up as much information about the Order as she could, and eventually began to gravitate toward the organization's academic facets. She has a passion for researching the Brotherhoods of old, with a side interest in the Pieces of Eden (mythical artifacts of immense power that have powerful effects on the minds of humans). Though she's never seen one up-close, she's fascinated by their mythic nature, and intent on keeping them out of Templar hands.

That book-learning didn't interfere with her combat training though, and she is every bit as fearsome as her staunchly-athletic brother. Though she prefers to take a stealthy approach during missions (in keeping with the Assassins' teachings), she doesn't hesitate to engage the enemy directly when the need arises. You might even say she can be *more* brutal than Jacob when it suits her. She reserves particular cruelty for her Templar nemesis, Lucy Thorne, who parallels Evie in both intellect and drive to find London's hidden Piece of Eden first. But not combat skills, obviously.

Disciplined, poised, and extremely intelligent, Evie exemplifies the best of the Assassin Order… unless her brother is around. Jacob's devil-may-care attitude clashes with her methodical nature, and while she's happy to join him in the mischief that leads to London, he's often too much for her to handle. It doesn't help that Jacob knows how to get on her nerves - her sharp tongue comes out around him more than anyone else, and the fact that he's the only person who doesn't treat her with the utmost respect (and has a nasty habit of pointing out her mistakes) leaves her on edge. Plus, he keeps making untoward remarks about her personal life, which just isn't done. As such, she's happy to get some alone time when she can, and the hunt for the Piece of Eden gives her a perfect opportunity. Unless he feels like tagging along to muck the whole thing up, of course. Her suffering runs deep.

WEAPON OF CHOICE

You can't go wrong with the tried and true Hidden Blade, and Evie's happy to put it to use when and where it's most needed. Preferring to stick to the shadows during her missions, Evie knows the Hidden Blade is optimal for the silent killings she prefers. Plus, steeped in Assassin lore and tradition, it's the perfect symbol of everything she holds dear. It's not as useful in a straight-up brawl though, so when the occasion arises, Evie is happy to put the versatile cane-sword to use.

FUN FACT

When there's something weird in the neighborhood (and it's the 1800s), you're gonna call Evie Frye, who is enamored with all things ghostly. When called on by Charles Dickens to help hunt down some supernatural criminals, she eagerly admits to her belief in ghosts and agrees to assist however she can. She apparently doesn't share that information widely, if Jacob's surprised reaction is anything to go by, but it does feel like a natural extension of her work. If you're obsessed with otherworldly pieces of technology that magically control the human mind, it seems like supernatural stuff is right up your alley.

HISTORICAL BUDDIES

Since Evie spends most of her time lurking in the darkness and trying not to be seen, she doesn't meet as many Industrial Revolution celebrities while out on her own as Jacob does. While she briefly meets Florence Nightingale and the two forge a crisis-averting partnership, it doesn't last long before Evie vanishes into the night. However, she's much more enthralled with Dickens' paranormal investigation club than her brother, and treasures her friendship with the always chipper Alexander Graham Bell.

THE SECRETS

Uncovering the mysteries of London with game director Scott Phillips, brand manager Carston Myhill and audio director Lydia Andrew

OF SYNDICATE

Syndicate is very much a return to form for the Assassin's Creed series, and a welcome first visit to London – a location fans have been demanding for years. As such, we had plenty of questions for the developers about how they turned the series around, and what it was like to finally be creating an AC set in good, old Blighty...

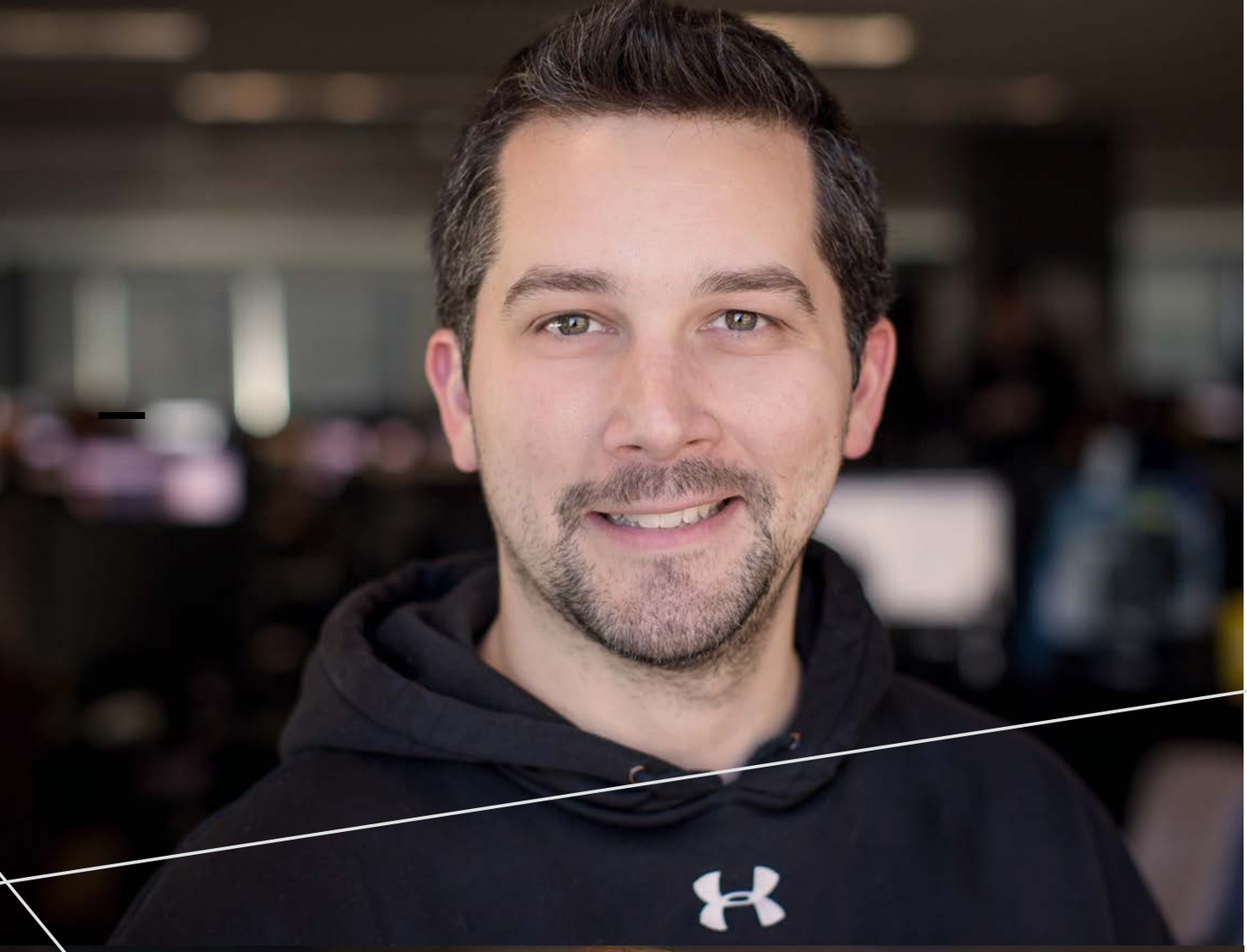
First off, Jacob and Evie are genuinely entertaining to watch and there are some really funny missions. This is very different tone to previous games, did you want to make Syndicate more light-hearted?
Scott Phillips: Yeah, I think that was definitely a goal from the beginning. We felt like, in the series we may have taken it a bit too seriously sometimes in the past. So with Jacob and Evie, it allowed us a great freedom to have that sort of brother-sister banter; their interaction with each other is great and the ability to play as each one of them also allows you to see different parts of the story, so you're not always seeing the same characters in the same situations. You can jump from playing Jacob and doing a hardcore mission to Evie in maybe a more light hearted mission.
Lydia Andrew: I think the writers and also the development team were conscious of the fact that because the game's set in London, they wanted to capture some British humour. The fact that London and England is a place that's well known for its comedy and comedians, they wanted to make sure that they captured some of that feeling in the script.

In terms of history were there any specific texts for missions or the atmosphere in London that were especially important for you to draw from?
Lydia Andrew: We did an awful lot of research, and the writers were definitely looking at the famous literary works at the time. There is even a joke in Sequence 3 where you first meet Charles Dickens and he makes a joke about Edwin Drood and how he's never going to get to finish that book. They definitely read a lot of Dickens' books and other books set in that time period. Also historical research books and working closely with Judith Sanders, our historical expert. Judith and Jean-Vincent Roy, who's based inside Ubisoft, were doing a lot of research into texts and novels of the time to try and pull out the mix of characters we might have.
Scott Phillips: For me, one of my favourites is Alexander Graham Bell, because I had pushed Marc (Alexis-Cote), the creative director; "We need a guy that's going to be your tool-maker" – your Di Vinci, essentially – and so we looked at what other characters that modern day people might know that existed at this time. We had a really good selection because invention was such a huge part of this era with the Industrial Revolution, and Graham Bell was a really fun character.

> DO THE TRAINS IN THE GAME RUN ON TIME? NO, OF COURSE NOT, THEY'RE BRITISH TRAINS SO CAN'T STICK TO THEIR TIMETABLE!

How important was it to have Syndicate's story interweaving with the larger AC lore?
Scott Phillips: I think in terms of London it has a big history in the franchise with the Kenways being from there and AC III – Haytham Kenway starting in London and AC IV ending in London, so there is a lot of stuff to pull from, and a lot of things that we felt like we had to deliver on. At least to give some more lore and some more insight into those characters that lots of people have loved from the previous Assassin's games.

The huge open-world London is incredibly busy. What went into its creation?
Scott Phillips: There's a world director and he comes up with what the vision of how an area should be 'alive' to make sure that the city is contrasted. So the more industrial areas will feel heavier, people will be doing more work with giant steam machines and those sorts of things. We're pretty experienced at building these atmospheric locations for Assassin's Creed and I think that this is a whole new level. I think that people will spend a lot of time finding and exploring and discovering a lot of the life that we've tried to bring in recreating Victorian London.
Lydia Andrew: We've been very lucky with this time period and this location to be able to draw distinctions in a very rich, visual way with the style of buildings, with the crowd characters that you're seeing on the streets and the animations of those characters. Plus the sound of those characters – we really can draw very big contrasts in quite a short travelling time around the city which might have been harder. When you're sailing a boat between islands in Black Flag; that's a very different experience from going between the >>



LEFT
Scott Phillips is the brand manager on Assassin's Creed Syndicate

BOTTOM LEFT
Lydia Andrew is the audio director on Assassin's Creed Syndicate

RIGHT
Carston Myhill is the brand manager for AC Syndicate

City of London to Southwark.

Carston Myhill: We hit the touch-points of English culture. I love stumbling across a cricket match, for example – a casual cricket match being wagered in St James' Park, or a kid playing kick-ups against a wall. That's the sort of stuff that as a Brit myself, really sort of grounds you in this country and this city.

Is there one particular area that you spent a ridiculous amount of time on to recreate?

Carston Myhill: We've been asked that question before, and it's a difficult one to answer. Of course, Assassin's Creed is always a multi-studio project. We've gone for a more shared approach with our landmarks, and so it's really hard to say or to count the exact man-hours done on say the Palace at Westminster and Big Ben. Suffice to say, there is a lot of tender loving care put into all the landmarks.

Lydia Andrew: And it's been incredible seeing those come together, seeing the Thames come together, seeing it develop and then these key landmarks. Being able to explore the city in that context and start using those key landmarks as points to orient yourself around will be great as a player.

Carston Myhill: Yeah, definitely – if you know London, you'll definitely have an advantage moving around the city than you do if you haven't spent any time in the capital, because those landmarks are visible and you'll recognise a hell of a lot.

I know that the bells ring at specific times in the game, is there anything else in particular you're excited for players to see, like do the trains run to a timetable?

Lydia Andrew: They're English trains, so no they don't run to a timetable! No but I think there are other elements in the game that are very nice. There's elements where just the changing time and date and to see the city, to see that skyline, to see weather changing gives a very different atmosphere to certain missions. Or when you're exploring the open world and you see something at sunset or at dawn or at night time it lends a different playing style.

> THE WRITERS WERE CONSCIOUS OF THE FACT THAT THEY WANTED TO CAPTURE THE BRITISH SENSE OF HUMOUR IN SYNDICATE

Carston Myhill: On that time of day point, I suppose one thing that players might notice is that – obviously we speed up the hands of Big Ben as they go around, but they are linked to the time of day. So when it becomes evening, you look at 7 or 8 o'clock on Big Ben, that's when it's going to start getting darker, so that's something that's very cool.

If you each have one tip for someone who's picking up Syndicate, what's the one thing that they must do?

Carston Myhill: Make sure you spend a lot of time with both characters. Make sure you level both of them up; they're both wonderful protagonists and personally I think a lot of us are excited about playing with Evie. And of course you have the choice in the open world to switch between them, so make sure you spend enough time with both twins – that sounds like an obvious thing to say, but be sure to do that.

Scott Phillips: I guess one sort of more not as well known thing would be to always be ready after completing a Conquest activity; the Bounty Hunts, the Templar Hunts, the Gang Strongholds and Child Liberations, because you may get the gang boss attacking you, and that gives you the opportunity to kill them early. You can get rid of all the gang bosses before actually completing that district and before owning that borough and engaging in the Gang War, so if you're aware of it – if you're ready and you've made sure to get all your tools and you can follow that gang boss quickly – you have a chance at killing them. It took a lot of effort for us to keep that just on the development side, so I would hope that a good number of people are able to at least try. And I hope a lot of people fail as well, I hope they try but aren't able to do it!

Lydia Andrew: For me I think the key thing would be to spend time exploring the city, because you're going to find collectables that you need. Spend the time exploring the city, get on a boat and go all the way down the Thames. Check out everything because there's lots of little things to find and there's a particular collectable that leads to something cool in the end, so spend time exploring the city.

SPOILER!

SERIOUSLY, IT'S A BIGGIE...

We asked Scott what was it like creating the 'secret' area of the game?

It was a really interesting time period. Close enough to the Victorian era that it didn't seem that different but it's massively different because the atmosphere is so completely different. There's this sense of danger, we wanted to bring the spy element into it, the secretive 'on the homefront' sort of feeling to the World War 1 time anomaly. I think setting it as an open world was also really important, so that there was a place that you felt like you could spend time in. I think the other main thing is having the Juno storyline take place there and sort of build on that lore of Assassin's Creed. As a fan myself, I really like learning more about the First Civ and I think that this was a fantastic opportunity for that.

A VIRTUAL TOURIST IN LONDON

Joe Skrebels explains what it's like to visit your home city... in a video game

Did you know that the huge, famous clock that juts priapically out of London's Palace of Westminster is called 'Elizabeth Tower'? Before 2012 – when all of Britain celebrated the longevity of its (alleged) Reptilian Überqueen by naming bits of masonry after her – it was just called 'Clock Tower' (which has always struck me as drably sad, like when rich people without proper feelings just name their dog, 'Dog'). Of course, no one other than bored historians and quiz enthusiasts actually call it either of these things. Get into one of London's renowned Hackney cabs and ask for Elizabeth Tower and you're more likely to be taken to a block of flats in Penge.

Big Ben is a parasitic nickname, one that's assumed control of its host, like how Michael Aday is now just Meat Loaf, or latent antimatter is Cheez Whiz. It denotes a thing we understand, but only because we've all accepted that it does so. If I wanted to go full Wachowski on your ass, I'd say that Big Ben, in the way we refer to it, does not exist. Which brings me to Assassin's Creed.

I'm not from Florence, or Paris, or The Sea, so I've never had intimate knowledge of the places Assassin's Creed has been recreating for the last near-decade. With Syndicate's shift to Victorian London, however, I'm suddenly playing a very different kind of game. The act of having your city turned into a video game space makes you both an insider and outsider – it's bewildering, and brilliant, like being let in on an in-joke that you don't quite get, but sounds funny.

Not only do I know this place myself, but the combination of the fact that this is by far the most recent setting for the series, and that London has stubbornly kept its madman's town planning for nigh-on 1000 years, means that not only do I get the ambience, but I start to legitimately recognise places I've been, and become baffled when I suddenly don't know where I am anymore.

I start my session in Whitechapel – an area I lived in for a year – and I'm immediately jolted from my mission (to start a street-level guerrilla resistance) into a game of alternate-reality Google Street Viewing. I walk away from Henry Green (the British-Indian Assassin/tutorial signpost included to signal London's impending multiculturalism) and try to find Commercial Road (where, not too long after the game's 1868 setting, London's first mosque will be built, signalling much the same thing). I peer at street layouts and wonder, if I waited long enough, whether Euro Miss, the weird clothes shop I used to pass that never seems to open, would appear.

I also get lost very quickly. I could tell you an exact route from Whitechapel Station to the Thames, but setting myself the challenge of taking it in Syndicate has me spinning. The Aldgate area appears to have disappeared almost entirely, meaning I skip over Whitechapel's tenement roofs and find myself right in amongst the industrial wharves of Wapping being used for their original purpose, before they were retooled into airy housing for all my friends who got proper jobs and can afford things like a local butcher's prices, or more than one pair of shoes. I can know exactly where I am one second, and be totally out of place the next,

LEFT
'Big Ben' towers over the other buildings in Syndicate's version of London

BELOW
Many of London's stations are present. And no, the train doesn't run on time

BOTTOM
The Thames is actually a district in Syndicate, and one of the best

London stretched and chopped and reintegrated as I go. I can navigate a faked-up 1100s Jerusalem better than a representation of the city I've lived in. That's odd.

LOST IN TRANSLATION

Clock Tower – you know, 'Big Ben' – is visible from almost everywhere. The game's director tells me that it's among the tallest buildings ever included in an Assassin's Creed – climbing it without the Rope Launcher takes minutes of ape-scrambling and impossible leaps. Once you reach the Synchronise point (I'm sad to see that it's circled by a now horribly displaced eagle, and not one of Trafalgar Square's ragged, bully-boy pigeons) you get a full view. It looks strange, places I know nestling far too close to the Thames' bulging route through the city. Like Big Ben, we're just calling this London because we're told that's what it is.

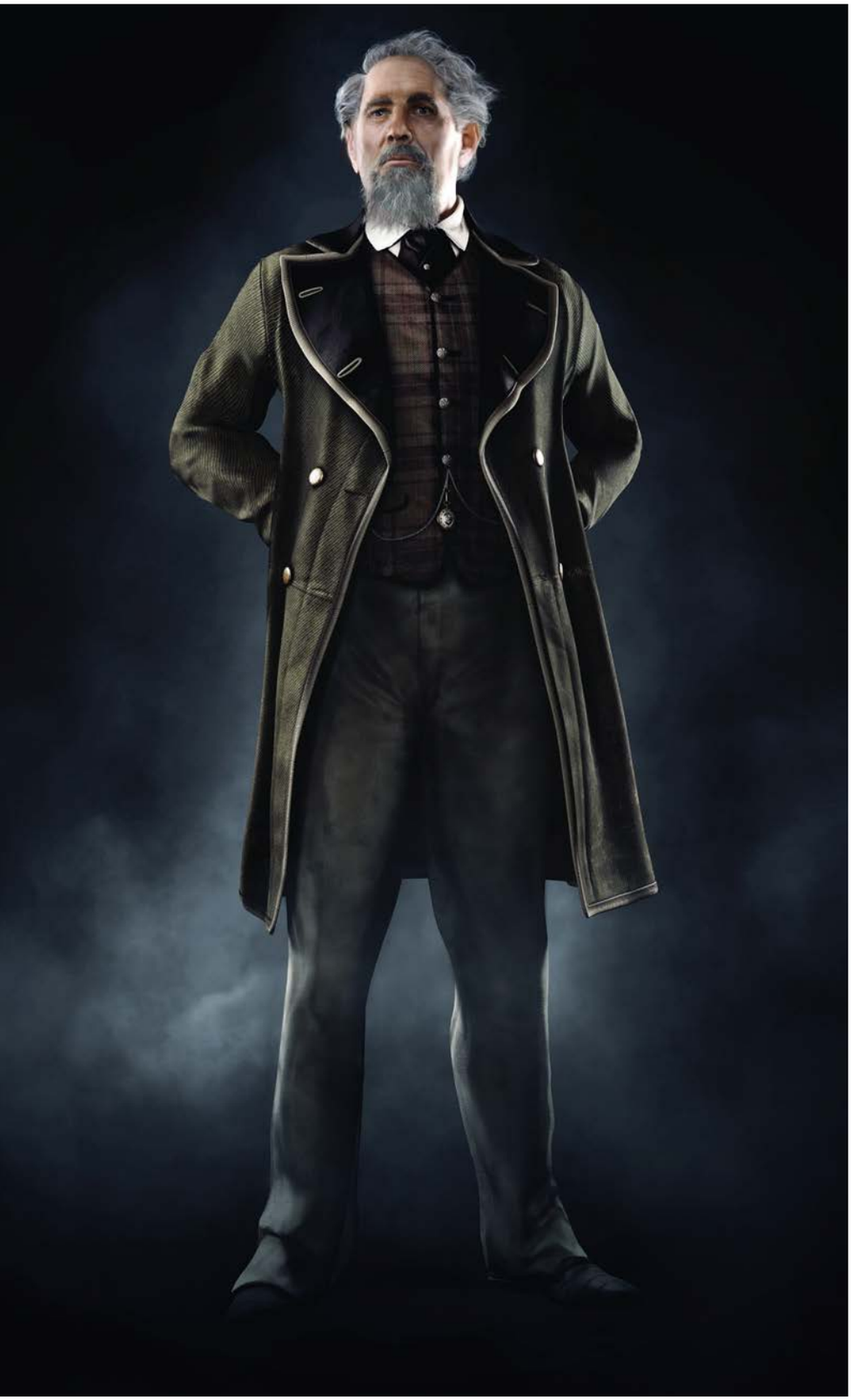
Of course, neither of these things are a problem. We call Syndicate's setting London because it fits the fantasy. We call it Big Ben because it's nice to make a building sound like it might have a job on the side as a wrestler. That the majority of you reading will have had no idea what or where I've been talking about for much of the article is sort of the point. For everyone else, this could well be the London they get to know best in their lives. You might get lost yourself trying to follow routes you took chasing down quasi-religious schemers, finding yourself in a Tooting Bec alleyway; terrified, and alone, and in Tooting Bec.

Everyone's a tourist in Syndicate's London – shown best by a very brief moment before I even start the game during a pre-release demo, which I attend with a bunch of other journalists, also from London.

Before I play, a man from Ubisoft Quebec gives a short presentation, to "prepare me" for the game. It's pretty low-key, but there's a very odd moment during a cutscene. An ancillary character mentions that now the early missions are done the Frye twins need to "return to Crawley".

He says this with the import of someone announcing that they've discovered a dinosaur island. The problem is that, to this room, Crawley is understood to be the kind of place Great Uncles retire to and die before you get to see them again – pleasant and nondescript. Everyone watching laughs, inadvertently, at treating this little place with so much respect, and the poor Canadian producer on stage looks from the screen at his audience with small-scale horror on his face. He doesn't understand that we know what Crawley is really like. We don't understand that, in his game, Crawley is a very different place to the one we know. In a way, that disconnect makes me all the more excited to explore Syndicate's London; to discover it all over again, from someone else's point of view.

WHO'S WHO IN AC SYNDICATE



It's often been said (mostly by Assassin's Creed designers) that Assassin's Creed's cities are like another main character. But, let's be honest, the real interest comes from its side characters. From a tyrannical George Washington to an actually magical Pope, Assassin's Creed's, er, flamboyant approach to historical figures is one of its prime joys. Not least when your characters start messing with them and influencing history themselves. We only need point you to Ezio Auditore accidentally inventing the latte with Leonardo da Vinci to prove this, right?

AC: Syndicate does not buck the trend. Victorian London arguably helped create celebrity culture as we know it today, meaning there are well-known faces, names and historical works strewn across the collective path of the Frye twins. Here are our favourites, along with some of the lovely little fingerprints you'll be leaving on their work. Tread carefully when walking the path of history, people!

CHARLES DICKENS

The world's most prominent author of books about orphans and beggar boys, Dickens is the first famous individual the Fryes run into. In this case, literally. Turning a corner as they enter London, Jacob smashes into ol' Charlie (in 1868, he was approaching the end of his life), spilling papers everywhere. In an odd touch, it's the infamously unfinished manuscript to The Manuscript of Edwin Drood. Yes, the first thing you do in London is destroy the final work of one of the world's most beloved writers. Good one, dude.

Dickens was incredibly popular during his own lifetime, his early books apparently even keeping a young Queen Victoria up until midnight in a fervour of discussion. The likes of Oliver Twist and a Tale of Two Cities mirror Syndicate's own depiction of a London controlled by money, and the lack of it. His keen interest in ghost stories, however, is the biggest draw for the twins. Well, Evie anyway, as Jacob isn't 'a believer'.

FUN FACT DICKENS IS SAID TO HAVE DANCED ON THE TABLES OF THE GRAPES PUB IN LIMEHOUSE, AN ESTABLISHMENT HE LATER REFERENCED IN HIS BOOKS. IT'S UNCONFIRMED AS TO WHETHER UBISOFT HAS MOCAPPED HIS SICK MOVES FOR FORTHCOMING DLC.

FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE

Known best for her (oft-debated) heroism in the Crimean War, Florence 'The Lady with the Lamp' Nightingale – not a wrestler, despite what that name might suggest – probably did her greatest work back home in London. Using her new-found fame to help popularise nursing as a profession rather than an extension of house duties, and setting up the world's first secular nursing school, Nightingale essentially set the standard for hospital treatment as we know it today. Not that that will really matter in an Assassin's Creed game.

Here, she's working out of the Lambeth Asylum but is, more likely, tending to Templar stab wounds and providing information on tracking down pieces of alien technology. Let's face it, we'll be facing her after a botched assassination attempt at some point, and we'll be thankful for it.

FUN FACT: NOT ONLY WAS NIGHTINGALE BRILLIANT MEDICALLY, BUT SHE WAS ALSO A GIFTED MATHEMATICIAN. HER OWN TAKE ON THE PIE CHART IS STILL USED TODAY, WHICH I REALLY HOPE WE GET TO SEE USED BY THE FRYES TO ACCOUNT FOR PERCENTAGES OF GOONS SHOT, STABBED, OR THROWN OFF OF BOATS.

KARL MARX

One of the fathers of Socialism, this stateless German (he was booted out for being too radical a thinker and, probably, for having too manly a beard to cope with) came to live in London well before Syndicate takes place. By the point Jacob and Evie arrive, he has already published the Communist Manifesto and the first volume of Das Kapital, the foundation stones of much of leftist thinking. To put it simply, he was really very angry about how the poor were treated, and wanted to get something done about it.

While we're not entirely sure that would have extended all the way to 'slay all the rich people in deliciously elaborate ways' (no matter what the ghost of Joseph Stalin tells you), London's Assassins clearly slot nicely into his circle of friends, and he himself asks the twins to make sure that they're working for the workers in their struggle against the Templars.

FUN FACT: MARX NEVER LEARNED ENGLISH, DESPITE LIVING IN BRITAIN FOR 30 YEARS. SYNDICATE TAKES ARTISTIC LICENSE HERE, BUT IT WOULD HAVE BEEN FUN TO HAVE HIM SHOUTING ALL THE WRONG WORDS.

>>

CHARLES DARWIN

A man reviled for his thoughts at the time, but proved right a thousand times over, Darwin is the perfect friend to the Assassins – a true counter-culture figure, and someone unafraid of the consequences of their way of thinking. He was, basically, rad as heck, continually disobeying rules because he preferred doing things his way (his dad wanted him to be a priest but he preferred going riding and shooting, and he spent five years on a cool boat trip, despite being acutely seasick).

This led, eventually, to On the Origin of Species, the evolutionary text that scandalised science at the time, and still informs modern thought on the commonality of species. His daring, anarchic character is perfectly reflected in game.

FUN FACT: DARWIN HATED A FAMOUS PORTRAIT OF HIS UNSHAVEN FACE, SAYING "HOW I CAN HAVE ONE SINGLE FRIEND IS SURPRISING". THAT MIGHT ACCOUNT FOR WHY HE ENDED UP GROWING HIS TRADEMARK ENORMO-BEARD IN LATER LIFE.

ALEXANDER GRAHAM BELL

There is a statistically significant chance that you'll look at your phone halfway through this sentence. There you go! Caught you. Rude. I can't really blame you, however, given that Bell here is the man responsible for this social abomination. The Scottish inventor had a deaf mother and wife, and this fact drove him to create the world's first practical telephone.

He's clearly a man that likes to help those in need – which accounts for why Syndicate recasts him as a genius gadget maker, like some proto Q in a period Bond film. He builds Evie at least two kinds of grenade, and fixes the Rope Launcher you'll use for much of the game – she reciprocates by (and this is not a joke), suggesting the name 'telephone' for his less violent invention.

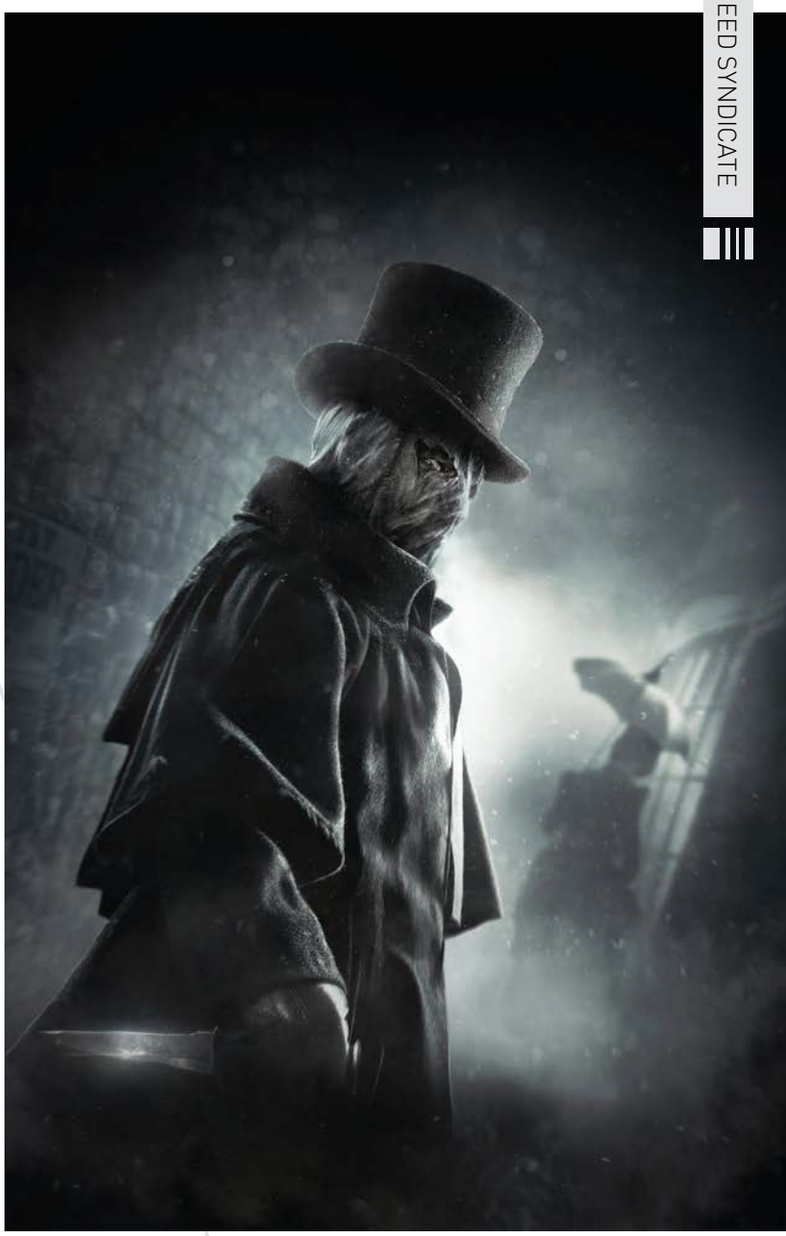
FUN FACT: BELL WAS A PROLIFIC INVENTOR, BUT HE OFTEN CAME CLOSE TO MAJOR BREAKTHROUGHS AND MOVED ONTO SOMETHING ELSE. NEAR MISSES INCLUDE NOT-QUITE-INVENTING AIR CONDITIONING, SOLAR PANELS, ALTERNATIVE FUELS AND THE PRINCIPLE BEHIND HARD DISK RECORDING.

JACK THE RIPPER

One of the most notorious serial killers of all time, Jack the Ripper terrified London by killing at five prostitutes and removing some victims' internal organs, perhaps with surgical precision. It's been debated for well over a century as to who Jack was, whether it was one person at all, and why they might have perpetrated these crimes. Luckily, Assassin's Creed is here to help solve this once and for all.

As part of the game's DLC, Syndicate will include a Ripper-themed pack that takes place 20 years after the events of the main game, and has you teaming up with Inspector Frederick Abberline of Scotland Yard to hunt him down. Ten quid says it's an Assassin gone rogue.

FUN FACT: IT'S A BIT DISTASTEFUL TO CALL ANYTHING THE RIPPER DID "FUN" AND, FRANKLY, I'M A LITTLE ASHAMED THAT YOU PROBABLY LOOKED AT THIS BIT WITH RELISH. SICKO.



DANCING WITH DEATH

Talking the sounds of Assassin's Creed Syndicate with Austin Wintory and Lydia Andrew

The open-worlds of Assassin's Creed would be nothing without their soundtracks. From Jesper Kyd's iconic At Home In Florence theme as you run across the sun-bleached rooftops of Renaissance Italy in Ezio's first outing, to singing along with your crew in Black Flag, the series' music has always been exceptional. Syndicate is no different, with Grammy nominated Journey composer Austin Wintory as the man behind the music, but the team took a new approach this time.

"For Assassin's Creed Syndicate, because we really do view it as the most modern Assassin's that's been made, we really were looking at it in quite a different way," explains audio director Lydia Andrew. "All of the Assassin's games have had incredible sound and incredible music but we really felt this time that we had this unique opportunity that we were moving into the modern age. We were moving into an age where, for example I could remember a lot of the songs or the classical music that was written at that time."

The team approached Austin Wintory in what he calls a 'cold call' that was very welcome. "I was immediately excited at the prospect, as a long-time player of the franchise, but also as someone ever-hunting for new challenges," says Wintory. "Lydia wanted to know what my interpretation of the world of Assassin's Creed Syndicate might be, so I threw a curveball her way in the form of a sort of a twisted approach to 19th century chamber music, and to my astonishment she loved it. And so off we went!"

"We really loved it," confirms Andrew. "It was just so full of energy, so full of life and so vibrant and that's another thing about the characters. Evie and Jacob are very dynamic. The city is very dynamic. We really wanted music that could blend together the idea of the Victorian era and the idea of this mechanised age."

When it comes to Evie and Jacob, each Assassin was designated their own instrument that reflected their personality. "We chose the cello for Evie and the violin for Jacob," says Andrew. "So even though when you are playing the game as either Jacob or Evie you may hear a lot of the same melodies, the top line is scored dependent on who you are playing as. One of the things we wanted to try and suggest was, while some people might say 'Oh, Jacob's bigger than Evie so he'd be the cello and she'd be the violin because she's smaller' we actually went for the opposite of that. We just felt that the

> PEOPLE WILL HEAR IT AND SAY 'YEAH, IT'S JUST THE BELLS OF LONDON...' BUT WE'VE GOT THE EXACT CHIME FOR ST PAULS AND BIG BEN

LEFT
Jacob contemplates the Thames as he synchronises a viewpoint

BELOW
The Strand area is one of the toughest to liberate, but it's also the most lively

BOTTOM
The game's music is designed to work with the mood of each setting

personality of the cello and what we could do with the cello just seemed to suit her. The violin is this very quick, very energetic kind of instrument and we just felt those instruments had a sound that fitted nicely with that."

Also, for the first time in the series, you'll hear specific music as you progress through the story. "One of the other things that we were thinking about was the idea of there being suites in the game," explains Andrew. "So you have the first movement, the second movement, the third movement, like a classical piece of music. So as you move through the game you'll hear different music."

SLICING THE SILENCE

And while all you might be thinking about in combat is reaching the point where you can embed a cane in a skull, the sound team had its own focus. "We wanted it to have a sense of fun and movement," Andrew enthuses. "We were kind of talking about that Victorian gothic dance of death kind of idea and it's based more on the idea of a waltz. When you are actually doing the combat it is more like you are dancing with your opponents." Wintory backs this up, citing Evie and Jacob's superior brawling skills as cause for celebration. "For these two, a fight against virtually anyone does not represent a genuine life-or-death epic battle," he says. "It's more like a cat playing with a mouse, and macabrely enjoying the dance. I rather obsessively channeled different styles of dance, with the waltz in particular, throughout the score to create that sense of ease – that Jacob and Evie are somehow, in their minds, above anyone who would dare cross them."

Stepping away from the music, the ambience of Victorian London is instantly immersive with the distant sound of steam trains, boats puttering down the Thames, horses clattering through the streets and even the sound of London's bells. It's these that Andrew is most proud of. "People will hear those but they'll just go 'yeah, it's the bells of London' but we've got the right chime for St Pauls, we've got the right chime for Big Ben," she grins. "Because we've got the progressive time of day we can't have them on every chime because they'd just be going all the time but we do have them four times a day with the right chimes at the right times of day and that makes me weirdly happy."

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THE STORY SO FAR...

WE TAKE A LOOK BACK AT EVERY GAME IN THE SERIES - AND DIG DEEP INTO THE EXTENDED UNIVERSE - TO GET YOU UP TO SPEED FOR SYNDICATE

ASSASSIN'S CREED

The first game in the series combines historical action, stealth, parkour and sci-fi. We're introduced to bartender Desmond Miles, who's kidnapped by the nefarious Abstergo Industries and forced to relive the memories of his ancestor, Altair Ibn-La'Ahad, in a quest for an ancient artefact known as the Apple Of Eden.

The game pioneers a set of now-iconic gameplay mechanics as Desmond journeys back into the past and into the sandals of a free-running Assassin from the Crusades. Although the killings become slightly repetitive – hunt, find, stab, run – scrambling across the skylines of bustling cities forms what was a ground-breaking open-world experience at the time. Altair is a perfect introductory character, as he's returned to novice status and forced to re-learn the Brotherhood's ways in bloody style with the signature hidden blade.

ALTAIR IBN-LA'AHAD
12th-century Assassin Altair is driven by loyalty to the Brotherhood and a hatred of the Templars.

MEMORY 1.0

NOTHING IS TRUE
There's nowhere better to learn the Creed than where it all began – from the head of the Brotherhood himself, Al Mualim, as Altair is stripped of his rank when he makes a deadly mistake.

LEAP OF FAITH
Haystacks had been mostly proverbial for people until this point. Here, though, whether in carts or on the ground, they make perfect kill spots as well as soft landings for elegant rooftop dives.

JUST KYDDING
As with all the games so far, composer Jesper Kyd supplies the dynamic soundtrack. From floating and poignant during city wandering to fast and frenzied during action, the music of AC is integral to its atmosphere.

KEY PLAYERS
The traitorous head of the Assassins sends Altair to kill nine Templars. His final target is the leader of the Knights Templar, Robert De Sable, who has been plotting the murder of King Richard.

WTF?!
The room where Desmond has been sleeping becomes a symbolic nightmare as his inherited Eagle Vision foretells the end of the Earth painted messily in bloody hieroglyphs around the room.

CAPTURE THE FLAG
Yes, all 700 of them. Ubisoft quickly learned for later games that no one wants to collect 700 of anything, but AC is a little eager to give you plenty to do. Assassin's fans may be collectors, but this is pushing it.

CITY SLICKER
In his quest, Altair journeys from the Assassin stronghold of Masyaf to the cities of Jerusalem and Damascus. The sense of freedom is staggering as you free-run over buildings with reckless abandon.

HIGH FLIER
Signified by an eagle, the viewpoints scattered across the map give you further synchronization within the Animus. Climbing to these lofty peaks opens up more of the map for Altair to discover.

WILL IT BLEND?
The art of blending isn't just for smoothie-making: a rule of the Assassins dictates 'Hide in plain sight'. This means blending in with crowds or sitting on benches are key ways to prevent detection.

GOLDEN JOYSTICK PRESENTS

ASSASSIN'S CREED II

The true beginning of the Assassin's games as we know them, ACII earned our much-coveted gold award upon its release. An upgrade from the original in every way, the sandbox of Renaissance Italy becomes the perfect location for swathes of new missions and the ultimate free-running paradise.

Still in the clutches of Abstergo (boo hiss!), Desmond is rescued by undercover Assassin Lucy Stillman and taken to meet two other Brotherhood members – historian Shaun and computer genius Rebecca. Under their guidance, Desmond plugs into an updated Animus and plunges into the 15th-century memories of Ezio Auditore Da Firenze. Whether blending in with crowds in the bustling streets of Florence or effortlessly leaping between Venice rooftops on a rescue mission, Ezio is no mere hitman – he is a hooded fighter for justice.

MEMORY 2.0

NOTHING IS TRUE
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EZIO AUDITORE DA FIRENZE
The son of a Florentine banker, he is both a lothario and Assassin; a lover of women and a hater of injustice.

ASSASSIN'S CREED: BROTHERHOOD

Another chapter in the interweaving story of Desmond and Ezio, Brotherhood was released a mere year after its predecessor. Perhaps not the sequel that many had been expecting, it moved the action to the enormous city of Rome. A little older and wiser, Ezio's combat is upgraded for his battle against one of the most powerful families in Italy, the infamous Borgias.

Meanwhile, in 2012, time ticks away for Desmond and his fellow Assassins as they run from Abstergo and quest to find an Apple of Eden before the Templars. Heavy weaponry is now an option for melee combat if you don't fancy using your hidden blade, and a crossbow is a lethal stealth addition to the arsenal. Retaining all the core dynamics of ACII, Brotherhood adds in an exciting multiplayer option and a guild of Assassins to send out on quests across the globe. Both are significant additions to the series.

◆ Ezio's double blades make a welcome return. ◆ Cesare Borgia says hi. ◆ Multiplayer offers a selection of characters. ◆ Fellow Assassins make useful allies.

MEMORY 2.1

ALL GONE
You might just shed a tear as Monteriggioni is destroyed in front of you in the Borgias' quest for revenge over the theft of the Apple of Eden. Just watch as Ezio loses every ability and weapon gained in ACII. Sob.

KEY PLAYERS
Machiavelli returns as Ezio's mentor within the Assassins, while Da Vinci assists, too. The Borgia family, led by the headstrong (and incestuous), Cesare Borgia, make for seriously evil villains.

WTF?!
There may be a mission in which you dress as a Roman centurion during a theatrical adaptation of the crucifixion – in the Colosseum no less – but the inexplicable conclusion takes the WTF biscuit.

BROTHERS IN ARMS
You may be used to the lone wolf approach, but the Assassins are a Brotherhood, after all – and this time around you can make the most of that. Save civilians from guards and they join Ezio's very own guild.

CITY SLICKER
Gone is the journeying between cities – instead Ezio has the sprawling mass of Rome to explore. It's so vast that fast-travel stations are introduced, and horses can be ridden through the streets.

BLEEDING EFFECT
Teased in the final scenes of ACII, Brotherhood boasts the first extended playable Desmond sequences. Having picked up many of Ezio's moves, his sections in the modern day are a nice change of scenery.

FURRY FRIENDS
Hidden deep beneath Rome are the underground hideouts of a dangerous sect known as the Followers Of Romulus. A series of puzzles leads you to shrines where you can help yourself to the lupine lovers' scrolls.

WAR GAMES
The Borgias have forced Da Vinci to build them a series of war machines, and it's Ezio's job to make sure the blueprints are destroyed. Cue self-consciously driving a UFO-like wooden tank through a Roman arsenal.

TOWER OFFENCE
Rome is under strict Borgia rule. Towers scattered across the city can be destroyed in order to gain the ability to renovate shops and factions – and pyromaniacs out there will enjoy each explosive cut-scene.

ASSASSIN'S CREED: REVELATIONS

Only one year after Brotherhood, Revelations arrived to tie the stories of Ezio and Altair into as neat a bow as possible. It also manages to be one of the most enjoyable AC efforts to date. After the tragic conclusion to Brotherhood (too spoilerific to be printed here), Desmond wakes up on a rocky island within the Animus. The only way to escape seems to be to dive back into the memories of his ancestors once again.

Revelations leaves the warm comfort of Italy behind and sails to the city of Constantinople, where an ongoing war rages between the Byzantines and the Ottomans. Stealth and combat are stronger than ever, with a new set of moves and an atmospheric, ever-changing city to explore. With playable sequences as Altair as well as Ezio, this delivers a cinematic conclusion to the latter's three-game stab-athon.

ALTAIR IBN-LA'AHAD
Now in possession of the Apple Of Eden, Altair battles to keep it as he discovers more of its potential.

MEMORY 2.2

CODEX CRACKER
We witness the writing of the Codex that's discovered piece by piece by Ezio in Assassin's Creed II. Altair pens his thoughts on the Apple of Eden, as well as giving some tantalising information on Those Who Came Before.

KEY PLAYERS
Altair spares Templar Maria Thorpe, taking her prisoner in attempt to find out more information on the Templar's plans. Eventually, though, cupid strikes and the pair end up married. Aww.

DON'T LOOK DOWN
Combat is considerably simpler than the other games in the series, but a satisfying feature taken from ACII is ledge assassinations. Altair is a nasty surprise for guards as he greets them hidden blade first.

WTF?!
Maria suddenly has a change of heart regarding the Templars, and instead of letting Altair die at the hands of an unnamed Templar soldier, stabs said soldier as he's about to take the Apple of Eden.

CROSS OVER
As they were released at the same time, Bloodlines offers special additional content for ACII. Six weapons can be unlocked for Ezio, including Bouchart's Blade and Maria Thorpe's Longsword.

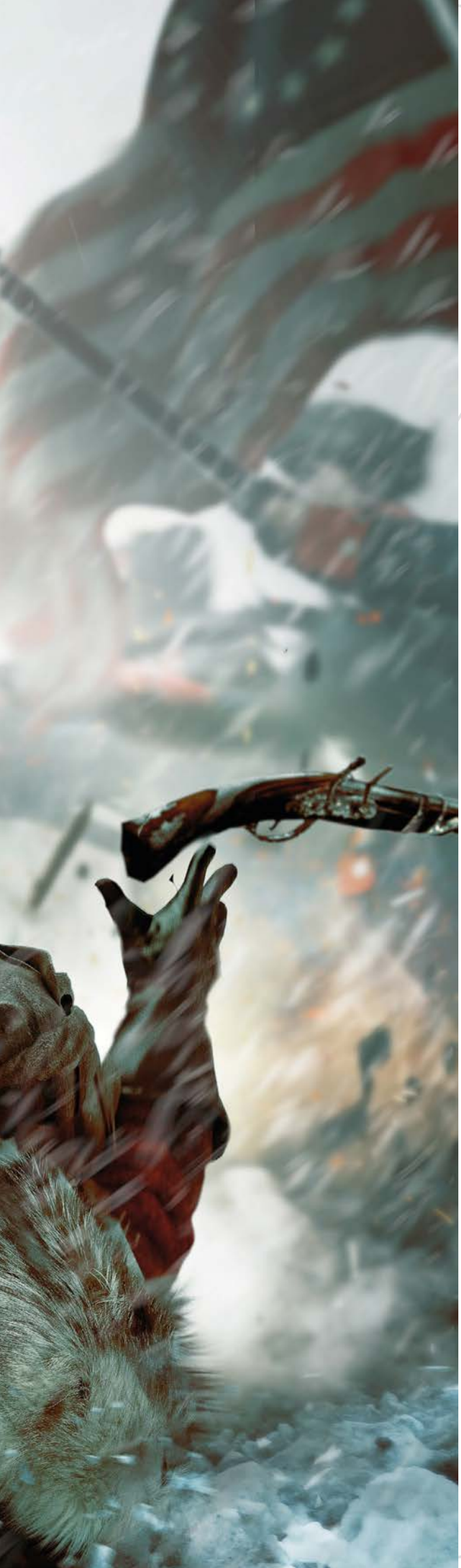
CITY SLICKER
Bloodlines begins with Altair attacking a Templar stronghold in Acre before travelling to Limassol and Kyrenia in Cyprus. Although new locations for the series, these are very similar to previous environments.

MAIL MAN
Courier interceptions and letter deliveries make up the bulk of the side missions available. Of course, everyone knows that Assassins moonlight as glorified delivery boys. Anyone fancy a Domino's?

INSERT COIN
Rewards for fulfilling side missions are Templar coins that can be used for upgrading health and inflicting more damage. Bronze, silver and gold coins can keep your synchronization high and your blade pointy.

INSTA-KILL
A simplified combat system may be a little disappointing, but it does mean you can instantly murder your victims once they fall to the ground, leaving you free to speedily scuttle on for more slaughter.

CONNOR KENWAY
Son of a Templar and a native American, Connor's weapon of choice is the tomahawk



ASSASSIN'S CREED III

Wow them at the end, that's the maxim. Assassin's Creed III, the overstuffed closer of the Desmond Miles trilogy, may not quite meet that brief, but it does somehow manage to provide dramatic closure while setting up the series for its excellent offspring.

With so much to tie up, many fans find its story self-indulgent and slow – it's hours before you leave behind Haytham Kenway and get to play as the box star. Still, it's too easy to forget how much ACIII introduces to the series that endures today. Naval missions, hunting and skinning animals, changing seasons, and freerunning across the organic wilds as easily as historic streets: all first appeared when the Templar-Assassin grudge match got tangled up in the American Revolution.

ACIII also brings us the twin treats of Boston and New York to explore in their inchoate colonial states, but it's the expansive wilds of the frontier and the salt wastes of the eastern seaboard that allow Ubisoft's flagship series to stretch beyond even its extravagant Renaissance period. New Assassin Connor Kenway quickly bows under the weight of it all, but players are able to stamp a personality on his homestead instead, a base of operations that grows as you fed it supplies. It's not hard to see what inspired the Cafe Theatre in AC: Unity.

So no, ACIII's jumble of fresh ideas may not have wowed as a final chapter. What it did do, however, was tip a crate of new ideas into the river and let others expand on what floated to the surface. How's that for revolutionary?

MEMORY 3.0

IV SHADOWING?
The pub at the homestead is called Mile's End, either a reference to Desmond's fate or Ubisoft Montreal's home district

HAMMER TIME
ACIII was the first Assassin's game to be built on the AnvilNext engine, which was later upgraded for 2014's AC: Unity

ZIMMER FRAME
Scot Lorne Balfe composed the game's music. He would go on to score for Beyond: Two Souls, Skylanders and Terminator Genisys

SEA SHANTY
One side quest has you hunting details about a mysterious sea monster. The result? Well, it's more Edward Kenway than Loch Ness

OL' STONY FACE
Connor, AKA Ratonhnhaké:ton, is a Mohawk. The Mohawk were a group of flint traders who dwelt in what is now upper state New York

FABULOUS FLYING MACHINES
Leonardo Da Vinci's gliding wings are resurrected for a brief cameo in one homestead mission. They first appeared in ACII

EAGLE-EYED REFERENCES
Connor's ship is the Aquila, Latin for 'eagle'. As well as being a motif for the Assassins, the alpha star in the constellation of the same name is called Altair

DID JUNO THIS?
Juno, the First Civilisation member who manipulates you in the Desmond sections, is based on a Roman goddess. As here, she was closely affiliated with Minerva and Jupiter

SNOW JOKING MATTER
ACIII was the first in the series to have changing seasons, giving us the snowy expanses of the frontier in winter

ASSASSIN'S CREED: LIBERATION

The first title to offer up a headstrong and extremely deadly female Assassin, Liberation is a great handheld adventure. It even uses the same engine as ACIII, which brings some unique gameplay elements with it.

Playing as Aveline, the love child of a wealthy father and slave mother, Liberation sees you walking the line that each of her statuses offer. Be it Aveline's gender, race or class, each is a role or persona that offers different strengths. You can even switch between classes, a unique twist to the Assassin's Creed formulae that happily bulks out the game's narrative.

While her Assassin skills are more than up to scratch, guards wouldn't just ignore the sight of you dressed in your robes and equipped with wrist-blades, forcing you to switch between Lady, Slave and Assassin as you plan more stealthy kills. Fire a blow dart from your parasol when dressed as the daughter of a French noble, or incite a riot among the slaves to create a distraction – they're both great ways to mask the act of brutally slicing your target's jugular. The feature is executed well and makes the more contained play space of New Orleans much more enticing to explore.

Sadly, an over-tendency to hand-hold in places and dodgy touch controls marr the experience somewhat. Throw in the fact that Liberation doesn't really tie into the series in any meaningful way, despite being better than ACIII in this writer's opinion, and it's little surprise Liberation receieved mixed reviews, drawing vastly differing opinions on strengths and weaknesses.

Still, 18th Century New Orleans is a beautiful, uncommon place to explore and well worth visiting.

MEMORY 4.1

BROTHERHOOD ON THE GO!

Exclusive to the PS Vita at release, Liberation offered a cool Risk style multiplayer mode that, while fairly sedate, had you tapping nodes on a map in order to capture bases and collect supplies. It was extremely addictive.

RE LIBERATING

For those that missed out, Liberation saw a HD re-release on the Xbox 360 and PS3, sans multiplayer sadly.

BACK TO THE FUTURE

Liberation is the first game in the series not to feature any real ties to the Assassins vs Templars war. Instead, casting you as a player of Abstargo Entertainment's brand new video game.

WALK ME HOME?

While outfitted as a Lady, Aveline can use her feminine charms to turn unwitting guards and thugs into her own personal entourage. Handy when you need a bit of protection!

PREDICT A RIOT

While blending in with other slaves, you can incite a mass riot to work as a distraction which was a great tool when in a bind. As long as your fellow men losing their lives doesn't weigh heavy on your conscience that is.

WHIP IT GOOD!

Unique to Aveline's fighting style, this deadly assassin is equipped with a whip and blow dart. For those over the top and extremely quiet kills respectively.

MAKE YOUR MARK

Taking a leaf out of Sam Fisher's book, Liberation allows you to mark multiple targets for some rather slick chain kills!

GO ON! TOUCH IT!

A novel idea (but spotty at best), the PS Vita's rear and front touch screens are used for a multitude of tasks such as picking pockets, steering your boat, chaining kills and opening letters. That last one is oddly satisfying!

THE SWEET SOUNDS OF MURDER!

Despite its mixed reviews, one thing everyone agreed upon was the game's stunning soundtrack. Composed by Winifred Philips, who cut her teeth with God of War, it went on to win a plethora of awards!

ASSASSIN'S CREED: BLOODLINES

A PSP-only offering released on the same day as Assassin's Creed II, Bloodlines continues the story of Altair after he reclaims the Apple Of Eden from Al Mualim at the end of the first game. More open-world stalking and stabbing is the theme – albeit in a simpler form that suits the handheld format – as Altair travels to Cyprus to investigate suspicious Templar activity.

The strong story holds this together, as combat and climbing are both sadly watered down. This is the only AC title in the series not to include Desmond, as it solely focuses on Altair's story and the continued battle for the Apple Of Eden, which the Templars want back. Bloodlines progresses its alternative history lesson quite happily, but quieter city streets due to PSP's limitations mean that nothing feels quite as fresh or alive as it should.

ALTAIR IBN-LA'AHAD
Now in possession of the Apple Of Eden, Altair battles to keep it as he discovers more of its potential.

MEMORY 1.1

CODEX CRACKER
We witness the writing of the Codex that's discovered piece by piece by Ezio in Assassin's Creed II. Altair pens his thoughts on the Apple Of Eden, as well as giving some tantalising information on Those Who Came Before.

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INSTA -KILL
A simplified combat system may be a little disappointing, but it does mean you can instantly murder your victims once they fall to the ground, leaving you free to speedily scuttle on for more slaughter.

ASSASSIN'S CREED IV: BLACK FLAG

Ah, this is more like it. While Assassin's Creed III's Aquila takes the odd cruise around the Atlantic, Black Flag changes tack and sets itself entirely in the Caribbean during the Golden Age of piracy. It's an ideal setting for Edward Kenway – a roguish Welsh throat slicer who blows both of ACIII's protagonists out of the water (sadly not literally) – while its lack of hard boundaries grants players the promised freedom that the brave New World never quite delivered.

That freedom comes primarily via the Jackdaw, Edward's upgradeable brig and your floating ticket to riches and adventure. With upgrades, it grants players license to hunt across the waves and under them, engaging in swashbuckling piracy to expand their fleets and their wallets, and weighing anchor for aquatic diving bell exploration or onshore away missions. Between bouts of high seas adventure, the cities of Nassau, Havana and Kingston host much of the drama, but it's the secret-covered islands, plantations and atolls that give the game its sense of sprawling vibrancy, and scratches the historical tourist's itch.

What makes Black Flag more than just its beautiful setting, though, is how adeptly it adapts old Assassin's tropes to serve the piratical fantasy. It's a thrill to see stealth and parkour turned on its head, now allowing you to swim out to an enemy vessel, clamber up the side and slowly divest it of crew, all the while knowing that you could have gone in with a broadside instead. Black Flag is an Assassin's Creed that suits the tactician, the thrill seeker and those with plain old wanderlust. For our doubloons, it hasn't been bettered since, although Syndicate comes mighty close.

MEMORY 4.0

GOLDEN AGE HERO
The Republic Of Pirates author Colin Woodard was asked to consult on the game, and helped to hone the historical accuracy of the script

WHOSE LINEHAN IS IT ANYWAY?
Listen to the two employees by the map (in the modern day) and you'll hear a line made famous by The IT Crowd: "Have you tried turning it off and on again?"

WHALE OF A TIME
PETA took exception to Black Flag, claiming it glorified whaling. Ubisoft, in response, said it no more condoned illegal whaling than a "a pirate lifestyle of poor hygiene, plundering, hijacking ships, and over the legal limit drunken debauchery."

BLUMING HECK
Blume, the corporation from Watch Dogs, is referenced several times in the Abstergo offices, from casual conversational mentions to a full CtOS briefing

SHANTY TOWN
Black Flag features possibly the best collectible in series history: sea shanties. Find one and your entire crew of swarthy cutthroats will regale you with it as you sail about the Caribbean waters. Yo ho, ahoy!

IV FOR ONE AND IV FOR ALL
Edward Kenway's adventures were the last in the series to appear on Wii U, and were ported to Xbox 360 and PS3. This makes it the AC game to have supported the most formats to date

REPUBLIC OF PIRATES
Slave-turned-pirate-turned-Assassin Adewale only hails from Trinidad because his voice actor, Tristan D. Lalla, is of Trinidadian descent

PANEL SHOW
Bizarrely, Assassin's Creed IV received a manga adaptation in Jump X magazine. The comic ran for nearly a year and spanned 12 chapters.

TEMPLE RUN
If you complete the Mayan Stelae puzzles, your reward is a snazzy First Civilisation outfit that can deflect bullets

EDWARD KENWAY
The father of ACIII's Haytham Kenway, Edward is a rogueish Welshman with a taste for shark meat and strong rum

ASSASSIN'S CREED UNITY

ARNO DORIAN
One of the smoothest Assassins this side of Ezio, Arno is part French, part Austrian. His father, Charles, is killed by Shay in AC Rogue.

Assassin's Creed Unity may be best remembered for the plethora of frustrating, and occasionally hilarious, technical issues that plagued its launch but that's a little unfair as the first entry in the series exclusive to the new generation of consoles was easily one of the best. Arno's adventures through revolutionary Paris and romantic storyline create a gripping narrative that keeps the modern day elements to a minimum in order to maximise the time spent in *that* incredible city.

Paris itself is massive but densely packed. More buildings than ever have accessible interiors, offering up new ways to travel around the city and the layout of the rooftops make free running easier than ever. A tweaked control system that allows for traversal downwards with the press of a single button as well as refined climbing animations result in the smoothest parkour experience yet and finally get rid of the issue of accidentally throwing yourself off a building. Well, mostly.

Unity was the first time that co-op was offered in an Assassin's Creed title. Up to four players can join forces to take on missions or explore the city. While the co-op only heists are never massively different to the single player missions teaming up with friends and infiltrating is an enjoyable experience that can create many comedic moments.

It's undeniable that Unity had a few issues, especially on the technical side at launch, but the overall narrative and the refined mechanics made it one of the more enjoyable entries in the series.

MEMORY 5.0

WHAT GOES UP
Unity was the first time in the series where there was a dedicated button for climbing down buildings instead of just falling, which led to the removal of many haystacks.

I'LL BE DAME-D
Senior level artist Caroline Miousse spent more than two years creating the almost 1-1 scale recreation of Notre-Dame Cathedral despite having never visited it in person until after development concluded.

THE BIGGER THE BETTER?
The city of Paris was significantly larger than any of the areas in previous Assassin's Creed titles with a impressive surface space of 21.4 square kilometres to explore.

FRENCH ICONS
Despite neither iconic structure existing at the time of the French Revolution both the Eiffel Tower and the Statue of Liberty make an appearance in the Helix Rift side missions.

IN-FIGHTING
Thanks to the warring factions of the French Revolution AI guards will often start fights with their rivals in the streets, creating a neat distraction to sneak past unnoticed.

I RECOGNISE THAT VOICE!
Arno's voice actor Dan Jeannotte voiced both Boston and New York merchants and an interrogation target in Assassin's Creed III and multiple Spanish NPC's in Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag.

TAKE MY HAND
Creative director Alex Amancio cited Ico as an inspiration for the love story element of Unity's narrative saying he wanted to avoid it becoming a side note to the main plot.

GALLIC SHRUG
English accents were used as the team thought it was clear to players that all the characters were French and having thick French accents would detract from the experience.

POWER TO THE PEOPLE
Being exclusive to the latest consoles Unity harnessed the extra power by allowing for thousands of NPC's to be onscreen at once, up from around 150 in previous titles.

ASSASSIN'S CREED: ROGUE

SHAY CORMAC
A former Assassin, now turned Templar, Shay is also a master sailor and a rogue to boot.

Rogue sees you stepping into the boots of Shay Cormac, an Assassin who's faith is well and truly shaken... enough that he fled to the Templar Order as a result. Suddenly, all those tactics and skills we know so well are thrown back in our faces, giving a glimpse into the life a Templar. And it isn't the hyper realistic, super-villain lifestyle we thought it was.

Being Shay means living a paranoid existence, constantly being watched and stalked by assassins as your friends are picked off, one by one. Walking past a hay bale becomes a tense affair as an Assassin could pounce at any moment. Hell, you can't even go for a simple trip on your boat without fear of being boarded!

Rogue manages to capture the idea that perhaps we haven't been told the truth all these years, and maybe 'good vs evil' is a matter of perspective as the Assassins seem hell bent on chaos, what with all the street gangs and schemes to gas New York.

Turning the tables in this way makes for a unique entry into the series and one that any Assassins Creed fan should get to know, even if it is just to sail the North Pole and fight off a giant Narwhal!

Sadly, Rogue was a victim of circumstance, releasing at the same time as Unity, and many simply saw this game as a re-skinned Black Flag or overly expensive DLC pack. It's much, much more than that.

MEMORY 4.1

DON'T LOSE YOUR HEAD
Fun fact - if you head over to the town of Sleepy Hollow, and wait until night time (can you see where this is going?) you'll be attacked by the Headless Horseman!

HELP! SECURITY!
Instead of taking lives for coin, Shay can take on protection contracts. Playing bodyguard is no easy task as you try to outwit some of the best in the order.

GANGS OF NEW YORK
Despite what you may think, Syndicate's street gangs aren't a new concept as their first appearance was in Rogue. As Shay trawls colonies, he cuts them down so British Troops can gain control.

SHAY THE RIPPER
Killing Civilians isn't an outright crime in Rogue. in fact you can go on quite the murder spree should the mood take you. It does gain attention from Bounty Hunters though, so maybe not a great idea.

HISTORY IN THE MAKING
Set between ACII and ACIV, Rogue ties the two stories together and puts an end to the Kenway Saga. It doesn't end there however as you may noticed Shay executing a key character in AC Unity. Spoilers!

SAY HELLO TO MY LITTLE FRIEND!
Did I mention that Shay had a grenade launcher? Say hello to the Boom-Stick!

THE GOLDEN COMPASS
In order to stay a step ahead of your potential killers, Eagle Vision is altered. Shay has a compass that points towards hiding Assassins.

A CHALLENGE OF TITANIC PROPORTIONS
On the good ship Morrigan, you need to avoid Ice Bergs with some serious sailing skills. You can also tear through them with your machine gun, which is something that helps make Naval combat a whole lot more enjoyable!

END OF AN ERA
Shay's targets in Rogue are key players from previous Assassin's Creed games. Sure, you won't like some of them, or know them particularly well, but there are a handful of people in this game who you really don't want to kill. Ouch.

ASSASSIN'S CREED: CHRONICLES CHINA

Because you'd always wondered what would happen if you made Assassin's Creed a Mark Of The Ninja style 2.5D side-scroller. Announced in late 2014 as part of Unity's season pass, Chronicles stars Chinese Assassin Shao Jun who is wreaking vengeance on a Templar group known as the Eight Tigers. Yep, it might have lost half a dimension but Chronicles is still all about inserting blades in evil jugulars, and it does it with some very pretty blood spatters indeed. Think 300 meets traditional Chinese ink painting and you get the gory idea.

Under the watchful Eagle eyes of Ubisoft Montreal, the UK-based Climax Studios manages to get in all the hallmarks of the Creed and sway the experience in a far stealthier direction to boot. There might be the very non-Brotherhood awareness cones but there's also Eagle Vision, haystacks to dive into, Animus fragments to collect and, of course, some satisfying assassination moves that includes a sliding kill that might just make you cross your legs. Despite its side scrolling nature, there's still plenty of ways to sneak and stab through Chronicles and its happy to let you explore its frankly beautiful environments. All in all a surprising success. Unless you're a Templar. Hard luck.

SHAO JUN
A Chinese Assassin trained by Ezio during his later years. Her story is detailed in the AC Embers short

MEMORY 5.2

AUDITORE HALLUCINATIONS
No, you're not seeing things. That's Master Assassin Ezio Auditore teaching Shao Jun the ways of the Creed in the training White Room.

LORE RANGER
You'll have met Shao Jun before if you've seen animated short film Embers where she travels to seek help from a much older Ezio in Florence.

BLADE DANCER
In a gory first for the series, Jun is armed with a foot blade for crunchily embedding in enemy skulls with a swift kick. Ow.

DEPTH PERCEPTION
While it's largely side-scrolling, there's some exhilarating sweeps of the camera as you turn corners and swing in and out of the screen.

RED ON YOU
Traditionally the Creed will lead your way with some stylishly draped white sheets. Not here. Follow the blood in 16th century China.

INDIAN SUMMER
Incoming Chronicles India follows Assassin Arbaaz Mir during the fall of the Sikh Empire. Mir is armed with traditional Indian Chakram and previously starred in graphic novel Brahman.

20TH CENTURY BOY
Nikolai Orelov is the lead in the upcoming Chronicles Russia which is stylised in black and white and set during the aftermath of the Red October Revolution.

ASSASSIN'S CREED THE EXTENDED UNIVERSE

Ashley Reed helps you synchronize with the history the games left out

Assassin's Creed is a tangled web of time-twisting tomfoolery, and that's pretty much by design. Throw in enough death-defying Assassins, international conspiracy theories, and magical mind-controlling god orbs, and things are going to start to get perplexing. But even if you think you've gotten a handle on the games, you only know half the story - Assassin's Creed has a massive extended universe spanning comic books, novels, and even a social website called Assassin's Creed Initiates that all contain vital information about the lore. Plus, all of them play directly into the main series, in ways the games never bother to explain. It's a lot to keep straight, but here I have the broad strokes of the Assassin's Creed extended universe, to help you get up to speed with the world of the Assassin's in all its convoluted glory.

What Adam and Eve have to do with the Assassins

While we see Adam and Eve very briefly in Assassin's Creed II - they're the two people fleeing a high-tech compound in The Truth, a video that becomes available after you find all of the game's hidden glyphs - the games don't really go into why they're so important to the Assassin cause. According to Assassin's Creed lore, humankind was created by a group of hyper-intelligent beings called the Isu (known as Those Who Came Before prior to the release of Syndicate) for the purposes of slave labour. They directed their massive workforce with Apples of Eden, basically magical remote controls that act upon neurotransmitters in the humans' brains, making them docile. It was the perfect system until, according to the Initiates website, the gods did what they do best and the odd bit of interbreeding slipped through.

That resulted in a small, human-looking group of hybrids who were immune to the effects of the Apples, fully self-aware but still treated as slaves. Some of them took exception to that, but nothing much was done until hybrids Adam and Eve made the scene, stole an Apple of Eden, and began a human revolution with Eve as its general. According to Initiates, that made Adam and Eve the very first Assassins, and the genetic source of the Assassins' unique powers, like Eagle Vision and resistance to the Apples. Not so much the stabbing, though.

And where do the Templars come in? Well, ACII has a bit to say about their son Cain...

How the Assassins of antiquity lost everything important

Centuries after Eve's revolution freed humanity (and the Toba Catastrophe, a real-life cataclysm, led to the in-universe decimation of the Isu), the Assassins were still hunting down the Pieces of Eden used by their former gods. Two such Pieces were the Ankh and the Scepter of Aset, which the 'gods' Osiris and Isis used to install the Pharaohs in Ancient Egypt before their eventual deaths. According to the Assassin's Creed comics published by Les Deux Royaumes, two of Desmond Miles' ancestors recovered the Ankh in Rome. It naturally turned out poorly for both of them, and one – a Roman named Aquilus – ended up very dead by pursuing it. His recently-pregnant wife hid the Ankh where it could never be found again, and as of 2014 the Templars were still struggling to recover it.

The Scepter, meanwhile, was gifted to the Mamluks, a faction of Arabic slaves in Egypt, who used it to overthrow the Ayyubid dynasty and establish the Mamluk Sultanate. It was eventually stolen by the Templars in 1340, to which the Assassins took exception; after a swift and violent struggle, the Scepter was dropped into a well near Edfu, Egypt, where it remains into the contemporary age, forgotten by time. There, now *nobody* gets it!

What the Assassins have to do with Genghis Khan, and what happened to Altair's family

Following his journey of self-discovery and mentor-murdering in the first Assassin's Creed, Altair Ibn-La'Ahad eventually married Maria Thorpe, Robert de Sable's body double, whom he fell in love with at first sight (literally while she still had the helmet on). They eventually had two sons, confirmed by a very awkward dream sequence in Assassin's Creed II, and spent the next 25 years awash in domestic bliss. But according to the Assassin's Creed: Secret Crusade novel, in 1217 Altair, Maria, and their eldest son Darim went on a family trip to murder Genghis Kahn, and that's when their troubles began.

Taking their sweet time getting the job done, the clan eventually finished Khan off in 1227 and returned to Masyaf, which they'd left in the hands of the youngest Ibn-La'Ahad son, Sef. Upon their return, they learned that Sef had been murdered by Altair's childhood rival, Abbas Sofian, and Altair's closest friend Malik had been framed for the deed.

The Assassin's Creed games and the novel disagree about what happened next: in the novel Sofian has Malik killed and gives his head to Altair when confronted, which doesn't happen in Assassin's Creed Revelations' recreation of the scene. However, they both agree on one thing: Altair attacked Sofian's vassal in a rage, and Maria was killed in the struggle, forcing Altair and Darim to flee Masyaf and go into hiding for the next twenty years. Though Altair was laid low by depression for much of that time, he eventually regained himself and retook Masyaf in the name of his late wife. Oh, and he recovered some Isu memory discs from an ancient temple and recorded his memories on them, which Ezio Auditore would later discover during his adventures in Constantinople. Straight-up grave-robbers, both of them.

>>

What happened to Ezio's best friend, Leonardo da Vinci?

Although deaths in Assassin's Creed are usually dramatic and showy with excessive amounts of blood, every once in a while someone gets to go quietly. Seven years after retiring from the Assassin Order in Revelations, Ezio visited his close friend Leonardo da Vinci at his home in Ambroise, France, and learned that Leonardo didn't have much time left. Ezio and fellow Assassin Machiavelli stayed in Ambroise until Leonardo's death in 1519, and Ezio remained at his friend's side until the end. The king of France would later take credit for being at Leonardo's beside when he passed on, which Ezio only took a little personally.

How Shao Jun knows Ezio, and how he died

Almost immediately after announcing his retirement, Ezio married Sofia Sartor, the lovely bookshop clerk he met in Constantinople, proving he was ever the silver fox. According to the Assassin's Creed Revelations novel, they had two children together (Flavia and Marcello) and settled in a villa in Tuscany by 1519. The downtime allowed Ezio to start contemplating his life, and the fact that he only had children at a late age weighed heavily on his mind.

Enter the short film Assassin's Creed Embers. In 1524, a young Chinese Assassin named Shao Jun (the protagonist of Assassin's Creed Chronicles: China) came to the villa to beg for Ezio's aid in rebuilding the Chinese Brotherhood. While he refused at first, he eventually came to admire Shao Jun's resilience and the struggles she had overcome, and agreed to train her. However, the two quickly found out that Shao Jun had been followed to the villa by Chinese Templars, and engaged a violent confrontation that nearly burned the whole place to the ground. Miraculously they survived, and Ezio sent Shao Jun off the next morning with words of wisdom and a mysterious box. However, the struggle proved to be too strenuous, and Ezio succumbed to a heart attack that same day, while out shopping with his wife and daughter.

What Edward Kenway's youth was like

If you'd guess that Edward Kenway was a right scallywag in his early years, then you've been paying attention – prone to gambling, brawling, and generally bringing shame upon his family, Edward was as rebellious in his youth as he was in his pirate days. But even back then he had a heart of gold buried deep down, and actually met his wife Caroline after confronting a pack of thugs trying to take advantage of her maidservant.

But good intentions only get you so far – according to the Black Flag novel and Initiates, after Edward married Caroline and decided to go to the West Indies to make his fortune, his father-in-law hatched a plan to be rid of him for good. Gathering all the thugs that Edward had ever infuriated, he set fire to the Kenway farm, hoping to destroy it and force his daughter to return home. Edward was able to save his parents, but the farm went up in flames, and his father disowned him out of rage and grief. Edward tried to take revenge on everyone involved, but was quickly overtaken by a Templar in his father-in-law's employ, and loaded onto a ship bound for the Caribbean. If ever there was a time to start a seafaring adventure...

How Elise sealed her father's death warrant

Turns out Elise de la Serre has led a much wilder life than Assassin's Creed Unity lets on. According to the Unity novel, Elise's early Templar training was interrupted by her mother's untimely death: despite surviving an assassination attempt in her later years, Julie de la Serre ultimately succumbed to illness, leaving Elise heartbroken and in need of distraction. When Elise's combat trainer traveled to Britain to uncover the truth behind Julie's attempted assassination, Elise followed, determined to find out who would act against the de la Serre family.

Meeting with an allied Templar family known as the Carrolls, Elise agreed to steal several of Haytham Kenway's letters from his sister Jenny, in return for information on the Assassin of interest. Elise posed as a young associate interested in the Kenway family history, and Jenny, decades older and eagle-eyed as ever, saw through her ruse immediately. However, she gave Elise the letters anyway, hoping the leader-to-be could unite the Templars and Assassins and end their eternal war.

Unfortunately, Elise soon discovered the awful truth: the Carrolls themselves had put a hit on the politically-moderate Julie, and wanted the letters so they could destroy any evidence that Haytham supported Assassin-Templar unification. Confronting the Carrolls, Elise was nearly killed for her insolence, but managed to get away by murdering their only daughter. Sadly, that wasn't the end of the story: Elise's actions in Britain increased anger toward the de la Serre family back home, and paved the way for her father's enemies to take him down. And then Arno went and made it worse. I can see why she'd be mad at him...

>>

How Edward died and Haytham became a Templar

And here everyone thought that Edward was going to get a happy ending after Black Flag. Unfortunately, the Assassin's Creed: Forsaken novel confirms otherwise. He did have a few good years - after returning to London with his daughter Jenny, he married a woman named Tessa and had another child, Haytham. During that time, he also became one of the most influential Assassins in London and built the British Brotherhood into a formidable force, so things were pretty swell. However, in his haste to marry Jenny off to a 'suitable' man (i.e. someone as different from himself as possible), Edward unwittingly put his trust in an undercover Templar named Reginald Birch, who knew of Kenway's exploits and wished to steal his journal full of Assassin secrets..

Jenny found out about the plan and attempted to warn her father, prompting Birch to stage a raid on the house in the middle of the night. Edward was killed in the scuffle and Jenny kidnapped, leaving Haytham alone with his distraught mother.

In her grief, Tessa turned custody of Haytham over to Birch, who assured the boy that his father was killed by the Assassins, and the Templars would help him take revenge. It was only decades later, after Haytham had ascended the ranks of the Templar Order and traveled to the New World, that he found out that Jenny had been sold to an Ottoman governor and staged a rescue. She told him the truth of what happened to their father, but even after they worked together to kill Birch, Haytham was too committed to the Templars to leave. He stuck with them and went on to become Grand Master, much to Jenny's disappointment. Stick to what you know, I guess.

What Adewale's family had to do with the Haitian Revolution

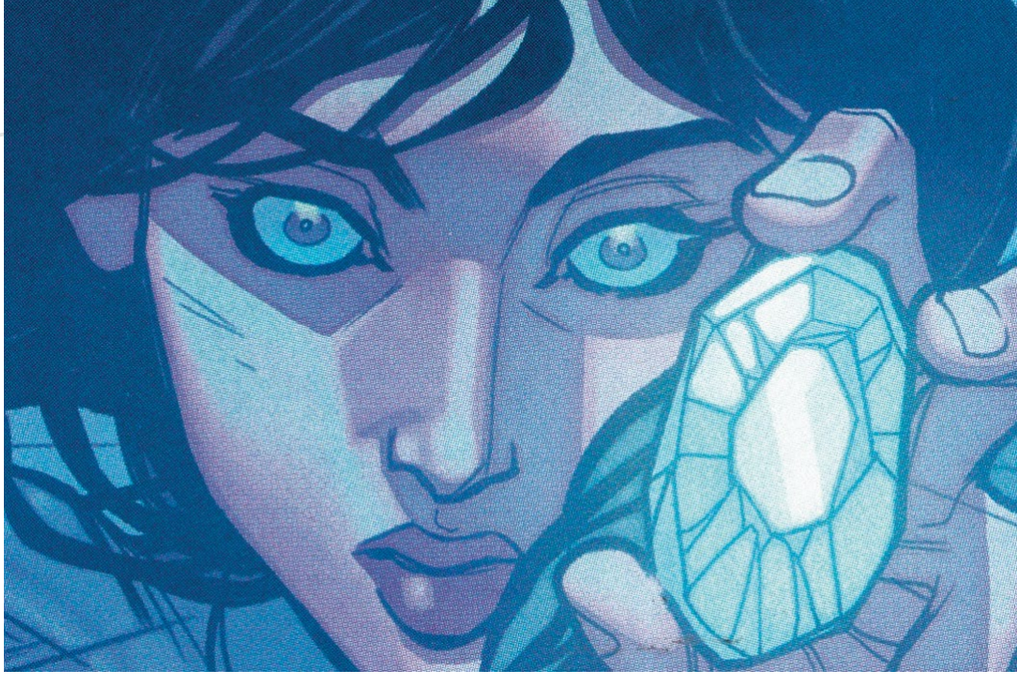
Adewale, star of Black Flag's Freedom Cry DLC, wasn't the last person in his line to do something important for the people of the Caribbean - his grandson, Eseosa, made an even greater impact by spearheading the Haitian Revolution, an event only detailed on the Initiates website. Building the Haitian Brotherhood up from near-extinction, Eseosa wished to end slavery and create a nation where citizens of all races could live in peace.

That proved to be more difficult than once thought: though he and his lieutenants were successful in leading the revolution, some of his subordinates took to killing civilians related to colonial powers, and both France and Spain honed in on what they believed to be a weak and buckling revolutionary government. Eseosa fought to keep the situation under control, quietly assassinating the interim French governor and installing one his own men, Jean-Jacques Dessalines, as leader of an independent Haiti. Unfortunately, he quickly discovered that massacring undesirables was the first thing on Dessalines to-do list. Disillusioned and out of friends, Eseosa accepted an invitation from American Assassin Connor to train at the Davenport Homestead, in the hopes of becoming a greater Assassin and one day putting an end to Dessalines. Worked out quite well.

What happened to the Assassin 'traitor' Nikolai Orelov?

Shay Cormac from Assassin's Creed Rogue wasn't the only Assassin to go... well, rogue. Before him (well, technically after), there was Nikolai Orelov from the Assassin's Creed: The Fall comic, a Russian Assassin beholden to the Narodnaya Volya, a real-life terrorist group and a brutal in-lore arm of the Russian Brotherhood. Orelov was personally present for/involved in the execution of Vladimir Lenin's older brother, the Borki train disaster, and the Tunguska event, which got him a good shock from Nikola Tesla for his efforts. Except for that one time he saved Princess Anastasia, Nikolai basically couldn't catch a break.

Instead, he took a break on his own terms, severing ties with the Assassins and fleeing to America with his family. Unfortunately, not everything went according to plan, and his wife and daughter were captured and deported during the Palmer Raids of 1919. To make matters worse, Nikolai discovered that the Volya were after him and his young son, Innokenti, with the help of the FBI. As Assassins tend to do, Nikolai ultimately went down in a blaze of glory, killing his former brothers, and shuffling off this mortal coil when Innokenti was forced to shoot him in the back to reach their final assailant. Expect to find all that misery recreated in Assassin's Creed Chronicles: Russia - hooray!



Why Henry Green's parents are important

Those who've leafed through Assassin's Creed Syndicate's database might know that Assassin Henry Green, the Frye twins' head informant, is secretly the son of an Assassin and a Sikh princess. That may sound like a tidbit tossed in for flavor, but those two – Arbaaz Mir and Princess Pyara Kaur – actually have their own story told through the Assassin's Creed Brahman comic (and will likely have it told again in the upcoming Assassin's Creed Chronicles: India). Their adventures centre on the Koh-i-Noor, one of the most precious gems in history and, like just about everything in Assassin's Creed, a secret Piece of Eden.

Originally, Arbaaz was charged with protecting Ranjit Singh, founder of the Sikh Empire and protector of the Koh-i-Noor, so that the Piece wouldn't fall into the hands of British Templars. Arbaaz, however, had a different plan: steal the Koh-i-Noor and let everyone else fend for themselves. Nice guy.

However, he was thwarted by Templars in the middle of an infiltration and his servant was forced to flee with the Koh-i-Noor, eventually giving it to Princess Pyara for safekeeping. In a bid to stop the enemies of her family and protect her new allies, Pyara activated the Koh-i-Noor, though it didn't turn out like she planned. Rather than destroying anything, it transformed her into an Isu conduit, sending a message to future generations who would eventually relive her memories through the Animus (because what would Assassin's Creed be without time-based kerfluffles). However, the Koh-i-Noor was shot in the scuffle and destroyed, killing everyone in the room except Arbaaz, Pyara, and the servant.

Why Daniel Cross is so important

Remember that guy in Assassin's Creed III, who showed up a few times to point a gun at Desmond before getting stabbed in the throat? That's Daniel Cross, and he's almost as important to the Assassin's Creed universe as Desmond himself. According to The Fall comic and Initiates, Cross was kidnapped by Abstergo at an early age and subjected to intense experimental procedures, imbuing him with a subconscious impulse to kill the Mentor of the Assassin Order. He was then abandoned to suffer the Bleeding Effect alone, forcing him to constantly see pieces of his ancestors' history, even outside the Animus.

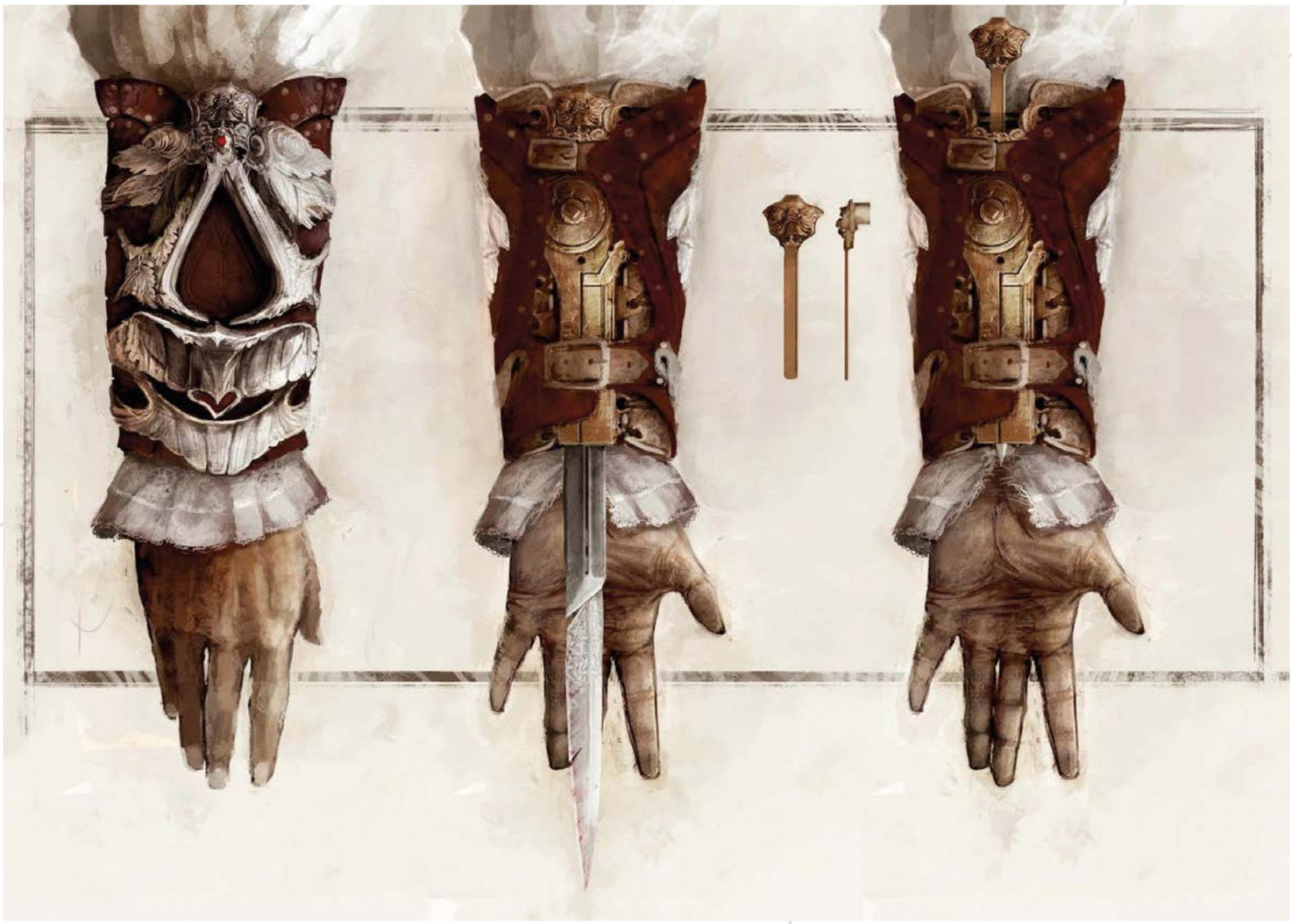
These hallucinations led him to a life of crime and drug abuse, though they could only do much to stem the tide of genetic memories. During one delusional incident, he caught the attention of Hannah Mueller, an Assassin and friend of Rebecca Crane, who believed he was a fellow Assassin gone haywire. Through Hannah, Daniel was introduced to the Assassin Order, and traveled the world visiting different encampments out of a deep desire to meet the Mentor. After two years, he got his wish and gained an audience with the Assassin leader - which went about as well as you might expect. Cross' impulse kicked in, forcing him to kill the Mentor and flee. Not knowing where else to go, Daniel return to Abstergo and became a pivotal piece in the great Assassin purge of 2000: because he had visited nearly every Assassin compound, the Templars were able to farm the information from his memories and conduct a mass extermination.

What the modern-day Assassins have been up to

Contrary to what the games might have you believe, Assassin's Creed's modern-day storyline didn't grind to a halt with the passing of Desmond. A whole lot has happened since then, and the best place to start talking about it is with a gentleman named Gavin Banks.

A close friend of the Miles family and captain of the naval Assassin base Altair II, Gavin was named Mentor of the Assassin Order when William Miles disappeared to grieve the loss of his son. Gavin gathered an elite team to help him with daily operations (from an ex-Templar medic to the last surviving member of the Russian Assassins, who you might recognize from Syndicate) and scoured the world in search of Assassin cells that had gone dark.

While Gavin and his team were able to establish contact with fellow Assassins in Japan and Georgia, their biggest breakthrough came when they discovered Shaun, Rebecca, and William hiding in Norway. Rebecca informed the crew that their ship's security had been compromised from within, and one of them was sending reports about the team's activities to a hacker collective called the Initiates. The culprit was eventually uncovered, but rather than execute them, William and Gavin struck a deal to bring the Initiates into the Assassin Order as an undercover digital arm. So if you're wondering why you keep getting called an 'Initiate' in the more recent games, it's not just because you're a rookie. Now you know.



EVOLUTION OF THE HIDDEN BLADE

How the Assassins' most iconic tool has sharpened, developed, and become more lethal than ever

Small, silent and utterly deadly. Yes, I'm talking about the hidden blade in Assassin's Creed. What did you think I was describing? As the games have progressed so has this integral tool and series icon, expanding both its capabilities and aesthetic.

Codex entries buried within the game mention a rather fitting quote from Altair himself: "The Hidden Blade has been a constant companion of ours over the years. Some would say it defines us – and they would not be entirely wrong. Many of our successes would not have been possible without it."

The hidden blade's beginnings are simple enough. A leather cuff with a single blade on the underside which could kill with a hand shake or high five to the jugular. It's a subtle weapon that can be hidden under a loose-fitting cloak, or inside a jacket with wider sleeves. And yet it's utterly deadly.

Interestingly enough, the very first incarnation of the hidden blade required it's user to have their ring finger removed. This is both for practical reasons (as it allowed the blade to extend smoothly without impaling the user) and cultural ones, as it showed the wearer's commitment to the Assassins order, if they were willing to lose one of their fingers for the cause.

THE SHADOW OF DEATH

Some time after the events of the first game, Altair uses knowledge gained from the Apple of Eden to alter the hidden blade, meaning it would no longer requite the loss of a finger. There's a joke about it in Assassin's Creed II when Leonardo first speaks to Ezio about rebuilding his father's gauntlet. This innovation meant Assassins couldn't easily be picked out from the crowd thanks to their missing digit. As the device continued to evolve along with the rest of technology, it no longer required the wearer to flick their wrist to active either. Instead it could be used with a clenched fist or flat palm, making its presence more subtle still.

The biggest philosophical change is also

down to the work of Leonardo Da Vinci during the events of Assassins Creed II, who worked from ancient codex entries left by the late Altair in order to create a second hidden blade. This additional tool is something that is reserved for only Master Assassins. It's cute that Ezio has to complete a training course in ACII to be able to use it, given how simple a concept it actually is. Sure, that's artistic license on behalf of Ubisoft Montreal (pretty sure Ezio wouldn't have had much trouble understanding its practical uses) but it's a great introduction to the possibilities afforded by having a second hidden blade.

Da Vinci was also responsible for the poison blade and hidden gun which – as their straightforward names suggest – allow you to poison a guard from close range and watch him turn on his buddies, or flip out a small gun and fire off up to three rounds as a last, loud resort. These both added a variety of tactical possibilities to the series. A favourite trick among less scrupulous Assassins was to poison a large axe-wielding guard, wait for him to start flailing wildly, and then throw coins at his feet for the city beggars to scoop up. The end result was both a massacre and a handy distraction.

Crossbow bolts and poison darts were the next logical progression, once again adding a new element to gameplay, but perhaps the most interesting move after any of these, was the hook blade. Traversal got that little bit easier as you could hook onto zip-lines dotted around the city of Constantinople or pull down scaffolds in the midst of a heated chase to try and gain an upper hand. More than this, battle became a little more cheeky, as counter-stealing allowed you to pinch someone's purse mid-fight, breaking their concentration and showing off just how worthy an opponent you could be.

By the time Assassin's Creed III rolled around, the hidden blade was fairly refined and not much was set to change until Ratonhnhaké:ton eventually obtained the pivot blade. This is an advanced alteration of the standard hidden blade which can rotate by 90 degrees, allowing the user to wield it like a dagger. Not only does this make short range skirmishes that bit more easy to deal with (making the hidden blade a genuine option in open combat) but skinning bears seemed a little easier too.

EURO-SLASH

The phantom blade, as seen in Assassins Creed Unity, is less of an upgrade and more of a refinement to Da Vinci's previous work adding crossbow bolts as an integral part of the design. With a much more advanced crossbow that could fold into the vambrace, Unity saw players able to fire rage inducing poisonous darts and straight-up deadly bolts over much greater distances, making pre-stealth planning a more pivotal point in the game's systems. More than that, it was a necessity for Unity, which featured a much larger, more densely packed world – sometimes getting close to your target simply isn't possible, so seeing them off from range is often the best tactic.

Not all blade progression has been tied to the wrist, either. If you played through the 2D side-scrolling adventure Assassins Creed: Chronicles China, you'll have no doubt used the foot blade. Initially a tool used by the Templars to fight back against the Assassins, it was later adopted by their enemies as a unique and highly brutal tool. There are some savage kill moves in Chronicles, many of them involving the foot blade.

> LOSING A FINGER TO WEAR THE HIDDEN BLADE GAUNTLET SHOWED THE USER'S COMMITMENT TO THE ASSASSIN ORDER

While it's inevitable more additions and upgrades will come, the most recent change arrived in the form of the Assassin's gauntlet. Used by British Assassins and introduced in Syndicate, the gauntlet has a much smaller form with a stronger blade and comes equipped with a rope launcher that can be used to rocket atop buildings or create zip-lines with which to speed down and rain death upon your foes.

While the simple hidden blade is now a small part of the Assassin armoury, it remains central to everything they do. The changes that have been made to its design all feel like natural progressions, and where functionality has gotten a little too fussy in certain games, the most recent iteration in Syndicate feels like a neat balance between basic tool and exciting gadget. And the wearer gets to keep all their fingers too...

5 KEY CHANGES

Here are the most significant iterations of the hidden blade

HIDDEN BLADE
Simple, beautiful and extremely deadly. Everyone remembers their first kill with this (and losing their finger beforehand)

DUAL BLADES
Keep a finger, gain a blade. Killing multiple guards with his beauty was another memory forever etched into the minds of those who played the game

FOOT BLADE
Brutal, bloody and down-right sneaky, the foot blade is an example of Templar equipment used against them

PHANTOM BLADE
It may not be a completely new design, but with poison darts and crossbow bolts as standard, this cemented the hidden blade as an all-in-one weapon

ROPE LAUNCHER
Added in Assassin's Creed Syndicate, this is more of a city traversal tool than anything, but it's an important evolution of the blade

EVERY ASSAS

Assassin's Creed has become a staple of the gaming calendar. As such, the series – with its labyrinthine lore – has generated a LOT of characters. Keeping track of them all is almost impossible, and creating a list of them all is nothing sort of madness. Still, that's exactly what we've done, even dipping into the extended universe to make this list of hooded heroes exhaustive. You're welcome!

Desmond Miles

(Assassin's Creed 1-3)

The modern day protagonist of Assassin's Creed, AC2, AC3, Revelations and Brotherhood. Phew. Captured by the Templars, forced into an Animus, then busted loose by Lucy Stillman, Desmond pretty much saves the world from a solar flare, but dies in the process. Ho hum, he was a bit vanilla anyway.

Daniel Cross

Assassin's Creed 3, Assassin's Creed: The Chain

A descendent of Assassin's captured early in life, Cross was a sleeper agent for the Templar Order. Instilled with an impulse to kill the Assassin mentor if the opportunity ever fell into his lap, Cross did just that in 2000, crippling the Order in time for an Assassin purge.

>>

SIN EVER

There are a whole lot of characters in the Assassin's Creed universe... but here they all are

Kadar Al-Sayf

(Assassin's Creed)

Malik's younger brother and a novice Assassin, Kadar was present during the ill-fated mission to retrieve an Apple of Eden from Solomon's Temple at the start of the first Assassin's Creed. He was killed in the chaos after Altair exposed their position to the Templars.

Malik Al-Sayf

(Assassin's Creed)

Head of the Assassin's Bureau in Jerusalem, and trusted friend of Altair. Although their relationship was rocky after Altair's neglect got Malik's little brother killed and his arm chopped off, he eventually came to respect Altair and signed on as his right-hand man.

Giovanni Auditore

(Assassin's Creed 2)

Aw, it's Ezio's father. He's executed at the start of Assassin's Creed 2, and it's only when Ezio is going through his possessions that he finds the famous hidden blades. It's safe to say that his father's murder is what spurs Ezio to become an Assassin, not just a trouble-causing Italian noble.

Abbas Sofian

(Assassin's Creed: The Secret Crusade/ Assassin's Creed: Revelations)

A childhood friend of Altair and son of Ahmad Sofian. He grew resentful when Altair informed him of Ahmad's suicide, believing that his friend was trying to slander him. Abbas' hatred persisted into adulthood, when he launched a coup d'etat in Altair's absence.

Swami

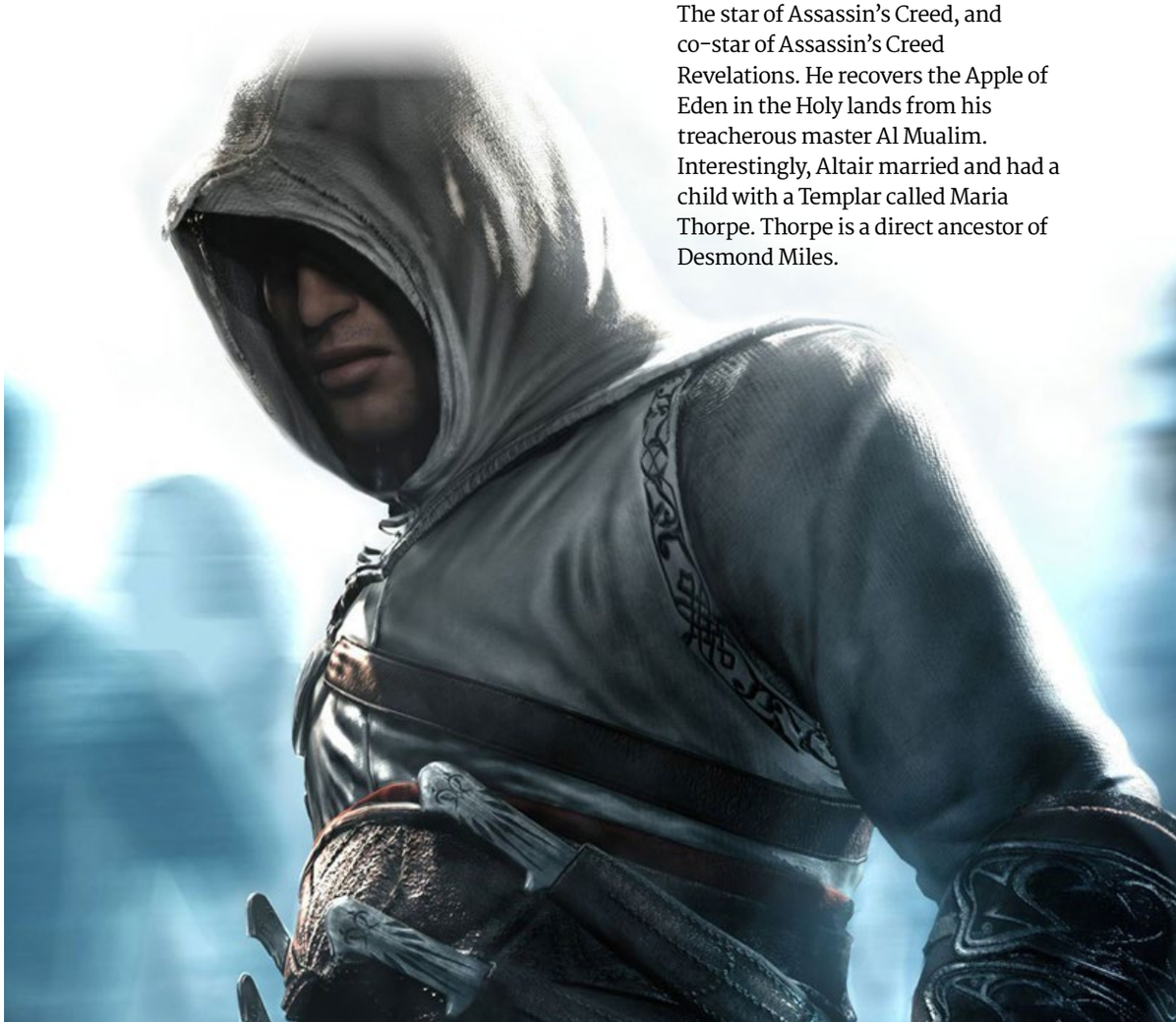
(Assassin's Creed: The Secret Crusade/ Assassin's Creed: Revelations)

Abbas' dull but brutal lcky. When Abbas ordered Sef's death, Swami was the one to do the deed. Altair killed him with the Apple of Eden upon finding out the truth, but not before Swami dealt a fatal blow to Maria Thorpe.

Altair Ibn-La'Ahad

(1165 - 1257) (Assassin's Creed)

The star of Assassin's Creed, and co-star of Assassin's Creed Revelations. He recovers the Apple of Eden in the Holy lands from his treacherous master Al Mualim. Interestingly, Altair married and had a child with a Templar called Maria Thorpe. Thorpe is a direct ancestor of Desmond Miles.



Bill Miles
(Assassin's Creed 3)
Desmond's father, and leader of the modern-day Assassin Order. Only decides to appear at the end of Revelations (plays a big role in AC3), rocking a weak beard, and a poor attitude towards parenting.

Darim Ibn-La'Ahad
(AC: The Secret Crusade novel/ Assassin's Creed Revelations)
The eldest son of Altair and Maria. He quells a Mongol rebellion by - wait for it - assassinating Genghis Khan in one of the AC novels.

Subject 16
(Assassin's Creed 2, Brotherhood, Revelations, AC3)
Known as Clay Kaczmarek to those who didn't treat him like a science experiment, Subject 16 was an Assassin mole who became a test subject to learn details of the Animus Project. It was agreed that fellow mole Lucy Stillman would help him escape, but when her defection became apparent, Clay loaded himself into the Animus as a computer program. But not before painting the walls of the research facility with his blood.

Al Mualim
(Assassin's Creed)
Altair's mentor and the patriarch of the Assassin Order. He briefly defected to the Templar cause before stealing their Apple of Eden and flipping everyone the metaphorical bird.

Rebecca Crane
(AC2, Brotherhood, Revelations, AC3)
The l33t haxxor of the Assassin team, Rebecca is responsible for all the technical doo-hickery that keeps the Animus running. During her travels with close friend Shaun Hastings (despite his dry criticism and terrible coffee), she discovers the Initiates spy network, and helps lead the charge to integrate Initiates into the Assassin Order.

Mario Auditore
(Assassin's Creed 2)
Ezio's uncle and the leader of Monteriggioni, Mario is the curator of his family's long Assassin history, most of which he keeps piled up in the basement of Villa Auditore. Acting as Ezio's mentor in the ways of the Assassin Order, Mario became something of a second father to Ezio after Giovanni's death. Also, he's a bit of a comedian.

Shaun Hastings
(AC2, Brotherhood, Revelations, AC3)
The sassy English Assassin in charge of intelligence for the American Brotherhood. Originally a junior professor who posted Abstergo company secrets to WikiLeaks in his spare time, Shaun was kidnapped by the Templars in 2010 and saved by Rebecca Crane. He joined the Assassins soon after as the resident, snarky history teacher.

Lucy Stillman
(Assassin's Creed, AC2, Brotherhood)
An Assassin trained alongside Desmond Miles by his father, Bill. She was then tasked with infiltrating Abstergo Industries as a mole for the Assassins, and received no contact from the Order for seven years. That's one heck of a long time without even a phone call, so feeling abandoned by her people, Lucy defected to the Templar cause in 2011.

Qulan Gal
(Assassin's Creed: The Secret Crusade novel)
A Mongolian assassin who helps Darim (Altair's son) kill Genghis Khan. Wears an excellent Mongol beard, and is an expert horseman.

Paola
(Assassin's Creed 2)
Leader of the Florentine courtesans (so, that's a nice word for prostitutes), Paola assists Ezio by providing him with groups of ladies. And while Ezio loves being surrounded by ladies, he mainly uses them to distract guards.

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Federico Auditore

(Assassin's Creed 2)

Ezio's big brother helps him out of all kinds of scrapes as a youngster, but poor Federico hangs alongside his father and little brother Petruccio near the start of AC2. Sniff.

Claudia Auditore

(Assassin's Creed Brotherhood)

Ezio's sister was recruited into the Brotherhood on account of her book-keeping skills. Still, mess with her numbers, and you'll still get the knife.

Teodora Contanto

(Assassin's Creed 2)

Teodora runs the courtesans in Venice. Owing to an early life spent in a convent, she's got the whole sexy-nun thing going on. That's probably why Ezio enlists her help to assassinate Marco Barbarigo, Doge of Venice.

Rosa

(Assassin's Creed 2)

A member of the thieves guild in AC2, and the woman who teaches Ezio to climb more effectively. The pair always flirt, but there's no suggestion of serious romance between the two.

La Volpe

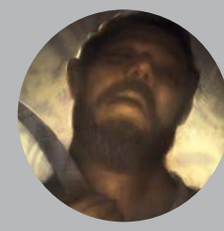
(Assassin's Creed 2)

Leader of the thieves in Assassin's Creed 2, La Volpe joins Ezio on several missions, and offers the assistance of his thieves to provide distractions.

Achilles Davenport

(Assassin's Creed 3, Assassin's Creed Rogue)

A former Master Assassin who trains Connor during AC3. He lives in the forests of upper New York state, and is a cranky old bastard. Nice house, though.



Ahmad Sofian

(Assassin's Creed: The Secret Crusade novel)

One of Sinan's spies and the father of Abbas Sofian. He sadly committed suicide out of shame after being captured by enemy combatants and traded for Altair's father, Umar Ibn-La'Ahad. Yup - Altair's father was an Assassin too.

Ezio Auditore da Firenze

(1459 - 1524) (Assassin's Creed 2, Brotherhood, and Revelations)

The wildly popular and lethally prolific star of AC2 and its direct sequels. The second son of a wealthy banking family secretly comprised of Assassins, he witnessed the execution of his father and two brothers at the hands of a traitorous family friend. Ezio began his life as an Assassin on a quest to avenge his family, but developed a deep attachment to the Brotherhood, eventually becoming Mentor of the Italian Assassins.

Nicollo Machiavelli (Assassin's Creed Brotherhood)

Famous tactician and thinker, renowned for his ruthless planning and social strategising. Despite this, though, he's a decent - if ambitious - guy who assists Ezio while he's a young scamp.

Domenico and Renato Auditore

(Assassin's Creed 2)

The first patriarchs to bear the Auditore name, since it didn't exist before they thought it up. Once a humble sailor's son living in Venice, Domenico met the Assassin Dante (no, the other Dante) and began training in the ways of the Brotherhood. He eventually married and has a son, Renato, and the two fled Venice after things went belly up and Templars came for their heads. Domenico adopted the Auditore surname, built the Villa Auditore and integrated his family into the nobility of Florence. Not bad for a former barnacle-scraper.

Jamie Colley

(Assassin's Creed 3)

More of an Assassin support-worker, Jamie is a trained physician. He mainly helps out the locals in New York, although having him on board allows Connor the ability to ambush enemies with Assassin recruits.

The Polos

(Assassin's Creed: Revelations, Assassin's Creed: The Secret Crusade)

Already famous traders by the time they were invited to meet with the Assassin Order, Maffeo and Niccolo Polo were tasked with the protection of Altair's Codex and memory seals when the Brotherhood was forced to flee Masyaf. Which they, er, lost.

Piri Reis

(Assassin's Creed Revelations)

A famous Ottoman admiral, Piri Reis joins the Assassin Brotherhood as a cartographer who conveniently designs bombs on the side. He's the one to thank when Ezio scares a crowd of people half to death by tossing around blood bombs.

Miko

(Assassin's Creed 3)

The holder of the Grand Temple Key and Haytham's first unfortunate victim in AC3. These two have something of a history, since Haytham stole his very first Hidden Blade off Miko before swearing to kill him.

Jacob Zenger

(Assassin's Creed 3)

A failed German farmer, Jacob moves to New York to start a new life in America. He's a tough guy, and recruiting him grants the ability to call in a prison escort that fools nearby guards. Bit niche.

Connor Kenway or Ratonhnhake:ton

(born 1756) (Assassin's Creed 3)

The po-faced Assassin, Connor joins the Brotherhood to resolve his daddy issues. See, his father Haytham (who is a much more interesting character) is a Templar, and has grand designs for revolutionary America that don't align with Connor's strict sense of justice. In his spare time, Connor enjoys sailing and killing small animals.

Robert Faulkner

(Assassin's Creed 3)

Connor's first-mate aboard the Aquila, Faulkner is a salty sea-dog who comes from a long line of sailors. He sailed with the Aquila most of his life, so technically, he just came with the ship itself.

Clipper Wilkinson

(Assassin's Creed 3)

This chap's a bugger with a rifle. A notable sharpshooter, he gives Connor the ability to pick off enemies at a distance once he's recruited.

Duncan Little

(Assassin's Creed 3)

This Irish Assassin used to be a priest, before he abandoned religion and set off to the New World in AC3. Recruiting him allows Connor to hire bodyguards in the game.

Deborah Carter

(Assassin's Creed 3)

Something of a 'princess of the streets', Dobby - as she is known to friends - helps the poor and facilitates black market business deals for the Assassins. Once recruited, she can provide distractions for Connor Kenway.

Louis Mills

Assassin's Creed 3)

Who is Louis Mills? He was sent to trail Haytham Kenway on his voyage to the new world, dropping barrels from the ship to give Assassin boats something to follow. Sadly, it didn't end too well for him.

>>

Stephane Chapheau

Assassin's Creed 3

A French baker who is pushed too far by British forces in Boston, and decides to rebel. He causes a riot, then joins the Assassins Order shortly afterwards. Good moustache.

Gérald Blanc

(Assassin's Creed 3: Liberation)

A childhood friend of Aveline and the Grandpre family accountant, Gérald is Aveline's primary source of intel thanks to his vast spy network. He also has a giant crush on her, which a descendant of hers hints is reciprocated after a trip in the Animus. Try not to think about that.

Baptiste

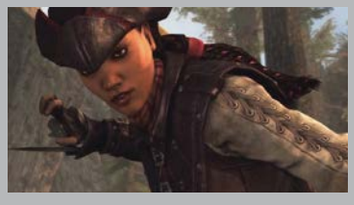
(Assassin's Creed 3: Liberation)

The traitorous former master of Agate, who tries to defect to the Templars. Notable for his use of voodoo, and the fact he's one of Aveline's victims. Also, his wing arm, which no one seems to talk about. Seriously, I can't be the only one who sees it.

Aveline de Grandpre

born 1747) (Assassin's Creed 3: Liberation)

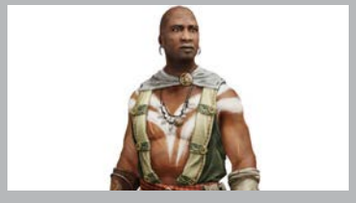
Ah, Aveline – the only female protagonist in the Assassin's Creed series. She joins the order to assist the plight of the poor and slaves, who are rife in the 18th century southern-states America she inhabits. She's a social butterfly, mixing with poor and aristocrats alike, and she has some killer surprises hidden in that parasol of hers...



Patience Gibbs

(Assassin's Creed 3: Liberation)

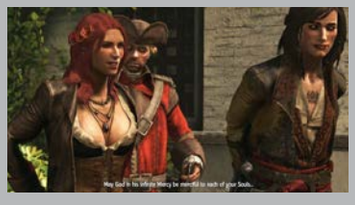
A former slave girl, sent to work in Newport, Rhode Island, Patience is eventually found and freed by Aveline, and recruited to the Assassin Order. Aveline helps her retrieve a mysterious charm during Liberation.



Agaté

(Assassin's Creed 3: Liberation)

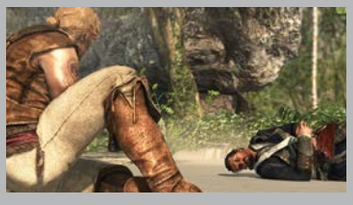
Aveline's mentor, who saved her from slavers after her mother disappeared. You'd think that would make me a pretty okay guy, but paranoia drove him to lofting heights of crazy, eventually leading him to attack his own pupil.



Mary Read

(Assassin's Creed 4: Black Flag)

When Edward and Mary initially meet, she's posing as Jack Kidd - winner of the least convincing 'boy pirate' in the Caribbean award three years running. Eventually, the two become an item, but they're captured by the British and Mary dies in jail. Sob.



Duncan Walpole

(Assassin's Creed 4: Black Flag)

Poor Duncan. He's the Assassin at the start of Black Flag, who Edward hunts through the jungle and eventually kills. Don't feel too sorry for him, though: he was planning to defect to the Templars, so probably deserved it.

Adewale

(1692 - 1758) (Assassin's Creed 4: Black Flag)

Edward's second-in-command, Adewale is a former slave with several axes to grind against Templars and bad 'uns throughout the Caribbean. A likeable fellow, Adewale gets his own DLC in Black Flag – Freedom Cry – where he wields a machete and a meaty blunderbuss shotgun.

Edward Kenway

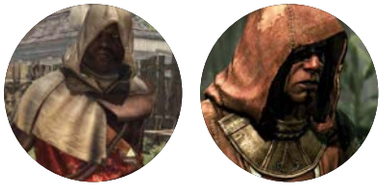
(1693 - 1735) (Assassin's Creed 4: Black Flag)

Oh stop it – you all know Edward Kenway. Father of Haytham Kenway, Edward starts life as a happy-go-lucky pirate, who just wants to drink, shag, and get rich. He becomes captain of the Jackdaw, and eventually gets guilt-tripped into joining the Assassins. Crappy husband, poor father, awesome rogue.

Anto

(Assassin's Creed 4: Black Flag)

Runs the bureau in Kingston. He's a charming older Assassin who matches Edward in a battle of wits.

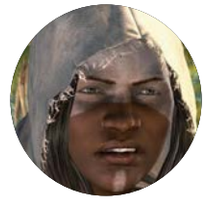


Ah Tabai

(Assassin's Creed 4: Black Flag)

Leader of the native Assassins order in the Caribbean, Ah Tabai is initially reluctant to recruit Edward because his moral compass doesn't line up with the tenets of the Creed. Still, he saves Edward from jail, so he's ok.

Rhona Dinsmore
(Assassin's Creed 4: Black Flag)
Scottish Assassin lady who joins Edward for several Templar hunt missions in Black Flag. It's pretty obvious she has the hots for Kenway. Then again, who doesn't?



Opia Apito
(Assassin's Creed 4: Black Flag)
Opia runs the Assassin bureau in the Cayman Islands. Initially distrusting of Edward, she soon warms up after our hero stabs a rare jaguar, and agrees to help her kill a devious Spaniard. Seems legit.

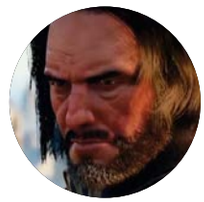
Upton and Vance Travers
(Assassin's Creed 4: Black Flag)
These Assassin brothers run the bureau in Nassau. That is, until Vance becomes obsessed with a Templar pirate called Jing Lang, and Upton enlists the help of Edward to 'end the affair'. By death.

Liam O'Brien
(Assassin's Creed: Rogue)
Shay's far-too-patient friend and Achilles Davenport's first student. Once a petty thief stealing from the rich to give to the poor, he's brought into the Assassin fold in his early teens and helps to recruit the rest of the Colonial Brotherhood, including his good friend Shay.

Hope Jensen
(Assassin's Creed: Rogue)
Head of the Assassin spy network and de facto don of organized crime in New York, Hope is master of all things stealth. She trains Assassin recruits in its ways and helps develop subtle means of assassination for the Order, including the poisons Shay becomes intimately familiar with.

Shay Patrick Cormac
(born 1731) (Assassin's Creed: Rogue)
Brash, crass and sure of himself, Shay is the turncoat star of Assassin's Creed Rogue. Shay joins the Brotherhood, but after his comrades began to execute plans that compromised his personal morals, he jumped him and turned to the side of the Templars.

Louis-Joseph Gaultier, Chevalier de La Vérendrye
(Assassin's Creed: Rogue)
A famous fur trader and explorer from Quebec, Chevalier is both thoroughly snooty and a critical asset to the Assassin cause. He and Shay dislike each other immediately, and cometo blows even before any of that treachery business of Shay's gets going.



Pierre Bellec
(Assassin's Creed Unity)
Arno's ornery tutor who is terrible at coming up with nicknames. He gives Arno crap pretty much 'round the clock, but every now and then his cranky admiration for the kid shows through.

Charles Dorian
(Assassin's Creed Unity)
Arno's unfortunate father, who is assassinated immediately after getting hold of [spoiler]. Arno eventually dedicates himself to finding and taking revenge on his father's mysterious killer - though if you stumbled upon the right clues in previous AC games, that person isn't so mysterious.

Kesegowaase
(Assassin's Creed: Rogue)
A Native American strategist and tracker, Kesegowaase was well-known for his skills years before Achilles approached him with an offer. However, when things start to get heated between the British and his people, he gladly joins the Assassins and puts his skills to work for them.

Arno Victor Dorian
(born 1768) (Assassin's Creed Unity)
The protagonist of Assassin's Creed Unity who just can't catch a break. Not only is his Assassin father murdered during a routine business trip, but then his foster father is killed thirteen years later, he's blamed for the deed, and his girlfriend turns out to be his mortal Templar enemy. He joins the Assassins to take revenge for the first two.

Honoré Gabriel Riqueti, comte de Mirabeau
(Assassin's Creed Unity)
You can call him Mirabeau for short. Best known as one of the leaders of the French Revolution and a hero of the people, he is also well known for his scandalous love affairs, which usually involved him sleeping with a superiors' wives.

>>

Eseosa

Assassin's Creed Initiates)

Adewale's grandson and author of his own detailed Codex, Eseosa follows in the footsteps of his beloved Gran pè and helps kick off the Haitian Revolution. This coincides with the occurrence of the French Revolution, and not just chronologically - in terms of chaos, drama and betrayal, Eseosa's revolution matches up more than he ever hoped.

Nikolai Andreievich Orelov

Assassin's Creed: The Fall)

A member of the Russian Brotherhood, Nikolai deals with more crap than most men could rightly handle. Though he's initially invested in the Assassin cause and assists with the bringing about of the Russian Revolution, a series of unpleasant events shake his resolve, and he eventually flees to America with his family (which doesn't end well).

Shao Jun

(Assassin's Creed Embers, AC Chronicles: China)

Once the Chinese Emperor Zhengde's favorite concubine, Shao Jun was rescued by the Assassins soon after his death, when the resulting power struggle put her life in danger. She devoted herself to the Assassins thereafter, even traveling to Italy to seek the counsel of Ezio Auditore when the Chinese Brotherhood fell on hard times. Now she's the star of the AC Unity DLC, Assassin's Creed Chronicles: China, so expect to see more from her.

Gavin Banks

(Assassin's Creed Initiates)

If there's a guy who did not sign up for this, it's Gavin. A close friend of Bill Miles and one of the man's most trusted associates, he is decreed Mentor of the Assassin Order when Bill goes into hiding, and isn't too excited about it. He governs the Order and his own elite team from the ship, Altair II.

Stephanie Chiu

(Assassin's Creed Initiates)

The medic in residence on Altair II, Stephanie escaped a life carefully controlled by her Abstergo-employed parents, hopped off the grid and joined the Assassin Order. When she isn't bandaging extensive stab wounds, she enjoys researching network science and growing marijuana. For medical purposes, of course.

Emmanuel 'Manny' Barraza

(Assassin's Creed Initiates)

One of the most ironic Assassins to ever live, Manny is a weapons expert and complete pacifist. Swearing to never kill again after his time in the armed forces, he still arms his willing comrades to the teeth.

Susan Drayton

(Assassin's Creed Initiates)

Gavin's first recruit and a radical environmentalist, Susan met the Mentor while trying to steal the Altair II to chase Japanese whaling vessels. She eventually agrees to act as his captain, which is almost as good as saving the whales.

Emmett Leary

(Assassin's Creed Initiates)

Former Abstergo employee, master programmer, and a deeply paranoid fellow, Emmett jumps at the chance to run away with Gavin's crew and away from all the people he thinks are after him. Turns out, he got away right before Abstergo agents shook down his home. Is it paranoid if someone really is watching you?

Eric Cooper

(Assassin's Creed Initiates)

Nothing says 'promising Assassin' like a revenge killing spree. The victim of a hate crime that killed his partner, Eric systematically hunted down all the people responsible, catching Gavin's attention. Once his mission is complete, Eric is invited aboard the Altair II to serve as first mate.

Galina Voronina

(Assassin's Creed Initiates)

The last of the imploded Russian Brotherhood, Galina contacts Gavin's team and offers access to her Order's secret research lab in exchange for helping her pull her mother out of a self-made Animus. Gavin eventually invites her to join the Altair II crew as his personal bodyguard after seeing her bring a knife to a gunfight and win.

Henry Green

(Assassin's Creed Syndicate)

The guy who tracks down Jacob and Evie, and your main quest-giver in Syndicate. He's a serious Assassin, which is why Evie likes him.

Kenichi and Saeko 'Osoroshii Baba' Mochizuki

(Assassin's Creed Initiates)

The elderly leaders of the Osaka Brotherhood, and Gavin's mentors. When Kenichi is killed in a raid by a yakuza offshoot, Saeko not only assumes his position in the Brotherhood, but launches a counterattack and takes over the gang herself. There's a reason they call her 'scary grandma'.

Jacob Frye

(Assassin's Creed Syndicate)

The bluff co-star of Syndicate, Jacob prefers to settle disputes with his fists rather than his hidden blade. You've already read about him in this mag, so he's here for completeism.

Evie Frye

(Assassin's Creed Syndicate)

Hmm... you've read about co-star Evie in this mag too. Is this the time to talk about the third playable Assassin in Syndicate? Nah, that way spoilers Frye, right?

KNOW YOUR

ENEMY

Ben Rayner digs into the history of the villains in Assassin's Creed and reveals... they're not all bad

What makes a great story? The obvious answer is a hero. A force for good that's both likeable and easy to rally behind. But this isn't the only, nor the most vital, ingredient to a gripping narrative. Decent villains are what you need; personifications of the 'dark side of life' who are both evil and shrouded in mystery. The hero needs something to stamp out.

With the Templar Order, Assassin's Creed games have tapped into rich history that's still not fully understood to this day. It has allowed Ubisoft to weave a complex power struggle that knits tightly into historical events we only have a narrow view of. It creates that annoyingly alluring Matrix effect of 'this sounds bats**t crazy... but I can't prove it wrong!'

So what do these tyrants want? Well, in Assassin's Creed the Templar Order has one simple goal: control. Directly opposed to the Assassins' beliefs of protecting free will, Templars think that should the human race be left it's own devices, the result will inevitably be war, suffering and ultimate chaos. This leads them to manipulate society as we know it and attempt control.

ABOVE
This is probably the most accurate representation of Templars in AC

ORIGINALLY, TEMPLAR KNIGHTS TOOK AN OATH OF POVERTY, AND THE ORDER SURVIVED ON DONATIONS

How? Well it all stems from technology created by a race of precursor beings with advanced DNA (who are responsible for the birth of the human race – again, this is all in AC lore). These 'Pieces of Eden' offer whoever holds them, extreme power, and the search for them has been the theme of most Assassin's Creed games. Interestingly, it's suggested in the AC universe that Jesus Christ himself had a piece of Eden in the form of the Turin Shroud, and was crucified by the Templars who wanted this shroud for themselves.

The Assassin's Creed series likes to weave fact and fiction, interpreting certain events in ways that fit the series narrative. But what's real and what's made up when it comes to the Templars? It's time I took you on a little history lesson and shared with you the story of the real Templar Order and how it compares to the vast soldiers of evil that you've spent the last decade stabbing in the throat.

During the Crusades, a period in history that saw the Middle East at war with combined Christian states, Jerusalem was captured in 1099 by Crusader forces.

Christians in the West began mass pilgrimages to the Holy Land in order to visit holy landmarks (something that was impossible prior to Europeans seizing control). Problems quickly arose, however, as despite key cities being protected, the towns and roads between were often swarming with bandits looking to steal whatever they could from pilgrims and more often than not, slaughtering them by their hundreds.

With reports of thousands of deaths pouring in, the French Knight, Hugues de Payens, approached King Baldwin II of Jerusalem and Warmund, Patriarch of Jerusalem, with the idea that he create an order of Monastic Knights (warrior monks, if you prefer) who would work separately from the traditional army and clear all roads of trouble whilst protecting Pilgrims on their voyage.

In 1120, Baldwin and Warmund agreed to this request and granted the Templars a new headquarters in the Al-Aqsa Mosque on the Temple Mount. It was widely believed that the Temple Mount lay on the ruins of the Temple of Solomon, which gave rise to the Order's initial name 'The poor fellow soldiers of Christ and the Temple of Solomon,' which was later shortened to the 'Templar Knights' or 'Knights of the Temple'.

Initially the order consisted of only nine knights, chosen by Payens. And, as their initial name indicated, each member took a Monastic oath of poverty meaning the Order was destitute and survived on donations. This quickly changed as Andre de Montbard, one of the Templars' founding knights, had a powerful ally in his nephew Saint Bernard of Clairvaux who just so happened to be a leading figure in the Catholic Church. Bernard chose to put his weight behind the order and in 1129 convinced his colleagues to officially endorse and approve the Order on behalf of the church. >>

THE KEY PLAYERS

Who are the most notable Templars in the AC series?

CAIN

We all know the story of Cain and Abel (No. Not that poor 3rd person shooter) but in the world of AC, the firstborn son of Adam and Eve, who later killed his brother Abel to steal the Apple of Eden was in fact part of the First Civilisation. The mark of Cain, which he was given for killing his brother, later became the Templar symbol making Cain – for all intents and purposes – the first Templar.

JACQUES BERNARD DE MOLAY

The last Grand Master and sage of the Templar Order, Molay was an important figure in the Order's history. Following his execution the Templars were disbanded and forced to become the secret organisation they have since become. He was later commemorated in 1937 by Abstergo Industries, the Order's new form. Apparently there is an image of him permanently on display within the inner sanctum of Abstergo.

BERNARD DE CLAIRVAUX

A french Abbot, while Bernard may seem an unimportant member of the Order, he was crucial to their initial formation and later getting the church on board as an ally, funding their future expeditions.

RODRIGO BORGIA

The head of the Catholic church, serving as Pope Alexander VI, he was the first pope to be elected from a conclave within the Sistine Chapel. In ACII he is also the Grand Master of the Templar order in Italy and arch nemesis of Ezio Auditore. In 1488 Rodrigo was responsible for obtaining a Piece of Eden from Cyprus. While under his reign, the Templar order focused primarily on taking control of Europe, losing sight of their true goals in a time that the Templars themselves often refer to as the "Dark Age of the Order"

HAYTHAM KENWAY

Son of the Assassin Edward Kenway, Haytham was converted into the Templar Order after his father's death in 1735. After heading to the British Colonies in America in order to locate a First Civilisation excavation, Haytham remained and became Grand Master of the new Templar presence. While the new Order grew and stomped out the Assassins, Haytham unwittingly conceived a son – Ratonhnhaké:ton – who became a crucial cog in the Order of the Assassins. He is also a direct ancestor of Desmond Miles.

This led to the Knights becoming one of the most popular charities in all of Christendom. Receiving donations of money, land and even the sons of Royalty who enlisted themselves in order to help fight and protect the Holy Land.

Quickly becoming an elite group of soldiers, in 1139 their power grew even more thanks to the Pope exempting them from all local laws (meaning they no longer had to pay taxes) and allowing their soldiers to cross borders while ignoring all authority, bar that of the Pope.

Cleverly Assassin's Creed lore tells a slightly different story, but one that could easily be mistaken for fact. While in the AC universe its still held that the Knights Templar were initially formed to protect pilgrims, it's implied that this was merely a way for the Templars to mask their true intent.

We know that the Templar Order had already existed in a more shadowy form for a long time but Bernard of Clairvaux pointed out that the Order could expand all the more successfully should they have the backing of the Catholic church, so creating the Knights as a protective force was simply a way to gain favour and a means to an end.

Although there have been many arguments amongst historians that the Order may have existed under another guise prior to becoming Templars, it's never been a cemented idea and is widely accepted that the order began between 1119–1120 and lasted until it was disbanded in 1312. However it could be noted that many sources have associated the Knights Templar with groups that later emerged, such as the Free Masons or the ever more far-fetched Illuminati conspiracy. However, there is still no definitive connection between these groups and the actual Knights Templar.

This essentially means the only 'realistic' historical representation of the Templars was in the original Assassin's Creed.

In reality, despite their incredible military prowess, Templars were also an extremely intelligent group of elites who knew the law well and were extremely involved in finance. Due to all the donations that started pouring in, a large section of the Order became individuals who managed wealth, rather than swinging a sword.

They had so much money in fact, the king of France borrowed a large sum from them in order to fund his ongoing war with the British, which is a fact that no doubt feeds into the AC lore of the Templars controlling eco-political agendas.

The Templars developed many financial ecosystems and in the 1150s they invented letters of credit, where pilgrims visiting the holy land could deposit valuables at what was essentially a Templar bank in Europe, and when they arrived in the Holy Land could withdraw the amount they had deposited in currency or equivalent items. Add on to that the affairs they would have dealt with, thanks to so many nobles joining the order, and it's widely accepted that the Templars created the first form of banking and cheque system, while simultaneously making pilgrims less of a target for bandits and marauders.

After the introduction of interest rates, the Templar Knights' wealth grew, with them eventually owning land all over Europe and the Middle East. They managed farms, businesses, and expanded into importing, exporting and owning their own fleets of ships.

It's this stage, the height of

TOP
Altair's former master defects to the Templars in the original AC

ABOVE
Haytham Kenway is the first time we get to actually play as a Templar

BELOW
In AC, the Templar Order endures in secret, much like the Assassins

ABOVE
In ACII Roderigo Borgia becomes the Pope, and Ezio gives him a thrashing

Templar power, where the AC universe and history diverge a little more. Assassin's Creed introduces us to the Templars later in the 12th century as a hulking power to be reckoned with, but in actual fact, this era marked the decline of the Order following a political and financial struggle against opposing Christian groups, the Knights Hospitaller and Teutonic Knights. At the same time, Muslim states had begun to join forces and push back against Christian forces, meaning the Templars were involved with several military clashes against local Muslim factions.

Under the Sultan Saladin, Muslim forces re-captured Jerusalem in 1187, after defeating the Crusader and Templar army on multiple occasions. With their headquarters lost, the Templars were forced to relocate to the city of Acre. This lead to years of lost battles and fleeing from land to land as their numbers and support dwindled. European powers grew unhappy with the Templars, who still answered to no authority but that of the Pope, and many withdrew their backing.

In 1305 Pope Clement V asked for the Templar Grand Master Jacques de Molay to meet with him to discuss the issue of a Templar Knight who was removed from the Order and criminally charged. While the charges seem to have been false, King Philip IV of France began looking into these affairs and, because he was in serious debt to the Templars, he used these circumstances to his advantage and either threatened or manipulated the Pope into approving the arrest of other Templar Knights under similarly trumped-up charges.

> MANY TEMPLARS WERE TORTURED INTO CONFESSING CRIMES THEY LATER DENIED COMMITTING

On the morning of Friday October 13th, 1307 (the reason we now speak of Friday the 13th with such reverent tones) French Templars were arrested all over the country on the laundry list of charges including participating in unChristian rituals, spitting on the cross, indecent behaviour, idol worship, fraud, homosexuality, and secrecy.

Under the Catholic inquisition, many knights were tortured into confessing crimes they later declared to have not committed. The coerced statements were still used against them due to King Philip threatening military action against the Pope unless he dissolved the Order entirely, which is exactly what happened in 1312.

After yet another trial, many of the knights were burnt alive at the stake. The last Grand Master of the Knights Templar, Molay, was burned at the stake on March 18th, 1314 for heresy. The legend goes that Molay shouted from the flames that King Philip and Pope Clement would soon meet God. The quote goes: "Dieu sait qui a tort et a péché. Il va bientot arriver malheur à ceux qui nous ont condamnés à mort" or "God knows who is wrong and has sinned. Soon a calamity will occur to those who have condemned us to death".

Molay's prophecy came true as Pope Clement died a month later while King Philip died in a hunting accident before the year was out.

This essentially heralded the end of the real Templars. With their leadership dissolved the rest of the Order were either arrested and tried, absorbed into one of the other military orders, or simply ran away to safer countries.

It's clear that Ubisoft has done a stellar job creating a narrative and wider lore that incorporates historical fact in a way that entertains and intrigues. With nods and winks to events laden all over the place, most notable for me is the opening of Assassins Creed, where we see the Templars thwarted from obtaining a Piece of Eden buried in the Temple of Solomon. This was a nod to the constant speculation that the Templars specifically requested their initial headquarters be based on the Temple mount, knowing that Solomon's Temple and all its subsequent riches lay beneath.

Most historical speculation claims that they were searching for either the Arc of the Covenant, the Holy Grail, or even the Shroud of Turin, which again adds narrative weight to the Pieces of Eden plot in the game. Either way, they're a great villain for a series that loves to tangle itself up in history.

I'LL STAB YOUR BACK AND YOU STAB MINE

Leon Hurley delves into the history of AC multiplayer

Some games are an obvious fit for online. Usually ones with lots of guns, running and something, somewhere, exploding. Assassin's Creed is not one of those. So it was no surprise to see many a dubiously raised eyebrow when Brotherhood (the 2010 middle game in the Ezio trilogy) announced it was adding multiplayer...

At the time it seemed like stealthy, historical assassination would be a disastrous multilplayer fit (Revelations' multiplayer game director Damien Kieken would later admit "it was a struggle") and Ubisoft was just trying to squeeze players for some extra cash. However, unbeknownst to anyone, Ubi had its Annecy Studios secretly prototyping ideas for two years prior, using the same team behind Splinter Cell's excellent and under-appreciate Spy vs Mercs mode. And the results worked, built around a stressfully tense game of cat and mouse between hunter

CHARACTER BUILDING
AC multiplayer lets you level up to rank 50+, collecting skills as you progress

SUPPORTING CAST
Due to the nature of AC multiplayer, many of the character models are seen in the single player games

NEVER COMING BACK?
Syndicate dropped multiplayer this year, and there has been no word from Ubi about whether it'll return

ASSASSIN'S CREED MULTIPLAYER CARVED OUT A NICHE AMONG FANS WITH ITS CHANGE OF PACE AND INTERESTING IDEAS

and prey in a crowd of oblivious NPCs, all wrapped up in a smart, Abstergo story.

Key to it all was that it perfectly recreated the singleplayer gameplay, with players blending into crowds in search of targets doing the same. Not deviating from the core ideas of the main game was critical according to original lead designer Arnaud Mametz. "When you develop a multiplayer mode, you're often creating a very different core experience. The player often needs to relearn everything. We believed that Brotherhood's multiplayer should be an extension of the solo experience, not a different one. We wanted [it] to be seamless, so that you could play without an extra learning curve. We had to respect the single-player pillars and extend them. Basically, we had to create something new without breaking the game spirit." Quite a challenge.

And that game spirit was preserved perfectly in the core mode Hunted, as individual players stalked one another using an infuriatingly vague compass system that indicated a target's direction, but only from a distance. Once you got close you were on your own, scanning crowds for any suspicious behaviour: was that blacksmith looking at you funny? Is that courtesan walking slightly out of pace with her companions? DID THAT PRIEST STOP AS YOU TURNED THE CORNER?! KILL HIM!

It swapped machine gun-powered killstreaks for a slow burning stressful paranoia that could break the strongest spirit. Worse still, you were rewarded for patience: a quick button-stabbing… well, stab, might net you a hundred points, while waiting, taking your time and holding it down could get you an extra hundred and fifty. It meant fighting back panic, in crowded streets full of potential murders that could strike at any time, long enough to max out your score. Mistakes meant killing an innocent, losing your target and usually blowing your cover – making you easy prey for the opposition.

Often your game ended in a sudden surprise death. Usually from the one character you hadn't noticed, especially if you weren't fast enough with a countering stun move (a system that wasn't really successfully implemented until Revelations). If that had been it then maybe the appeal would have been short lived, but Annecy had done its homework during those two years of secret testing. "The first prototypes were clearly unbalanced, very 'run and kill' oriented," explains Mametz, "but we kept testing ideas. Lots of iterations were necessary; looking and trying many things can create some frustrations but out of the tests came the ideas for the chase and escape sequences, and for the threat meters."

While obvious actions like climbing or blatantly unusual behaviour could give opponents away visually, a threat meter kept >>

track of smaller indiscretions and would eventually reveal them and trigger a chase sequence. This switched the dynamic totally, from careful stealth and observation, to a full on charge through the crowd as the pursuer tried to run down the target. It left players pelting through the street trying to break line of sight with their attackers, or trigger chase breakers. Doors could be slammed, portcullises dropped, or roof-accessing rope lifts grabbed to prevent your foe getting a hand on you.

Into this patient mix of stabbing and terror Assassin's Creed introduced a range of abilities and perks, unlocked as you leveled up, that could only work in a game about watching crowds and hiding. Things like the Disguise ability that let you appear as another character, or Decoy, to make an NPC look like someone else. Weapons like tripwire bombs could take out attackers, while firecrackers worked both as a distraction and a way of exposing potential enemies. Perks further enhanced your abilities, like reducing cooldowns, or increasing the distance of opponent-tracking target locks. The end game might have always been a shiv thrust somewhere personal but players could mix and match approaches to tailor their murderous tastes.

This core predator/prey system and its range of abilities worked so well that it suited a number of variant modes in its original debut. Manhunt swapped out the lone wolf set up of Hunted for competing teams, while Alliance involved an asymmetrical blend of three teams, each with two players, competing to score the kills while avoiding a hidden blade to the lungs from rivals.

It was even able to create variations of more familiar online modes as the series progressed. Revelations introduced things like Escort, a VIP-style protection mode, and Chest Capture where teams competed to protect and steal chests, all while blending in unobserved. While Assasin's Creed III brought with it the territory-capturing Domination. Black Flag also introduced Game Lab, a mission customiser that enabled players to tweak and alter around 200 variables across existing modes.

Assassin's Creed's multiplayer was never a dominating success but it had a cult following and carved out a firm niche among fans with its change of pace and interesting ideas.

MULTIPLAYER SWAPS MACHINE-GUN POWERED KILL-STREAKS FOR SLOW-BURNING, STRESSFUL PARANOIA

However it wasn't to last. Unity saw multiplayer dropped in favour of co-op, an idea that, like multiplayer before, seemed like an ill fit for the series. "We had doubts about co-op," explained Unity's senior producer Vincent Pontbriand. "Being an Assassin [is] a very solo experience so we had to embrace that." Again it meant warping what people might expect. There's the open world to think about, as well as multiple strategies and activities. "We call it the shared experience," says Pontbriand. "We're letting you play in a sandbox together. If you end up fighting back to back, that's great! Or synchronising your kills? That's super, but at the same time you could go this way and I could go that way and it's fine." As fun as it could be, co-op was admittedly a less successful experiment than multiplayer, lacking its deeper mechanics and tension - just you and some friends messing up Paris.

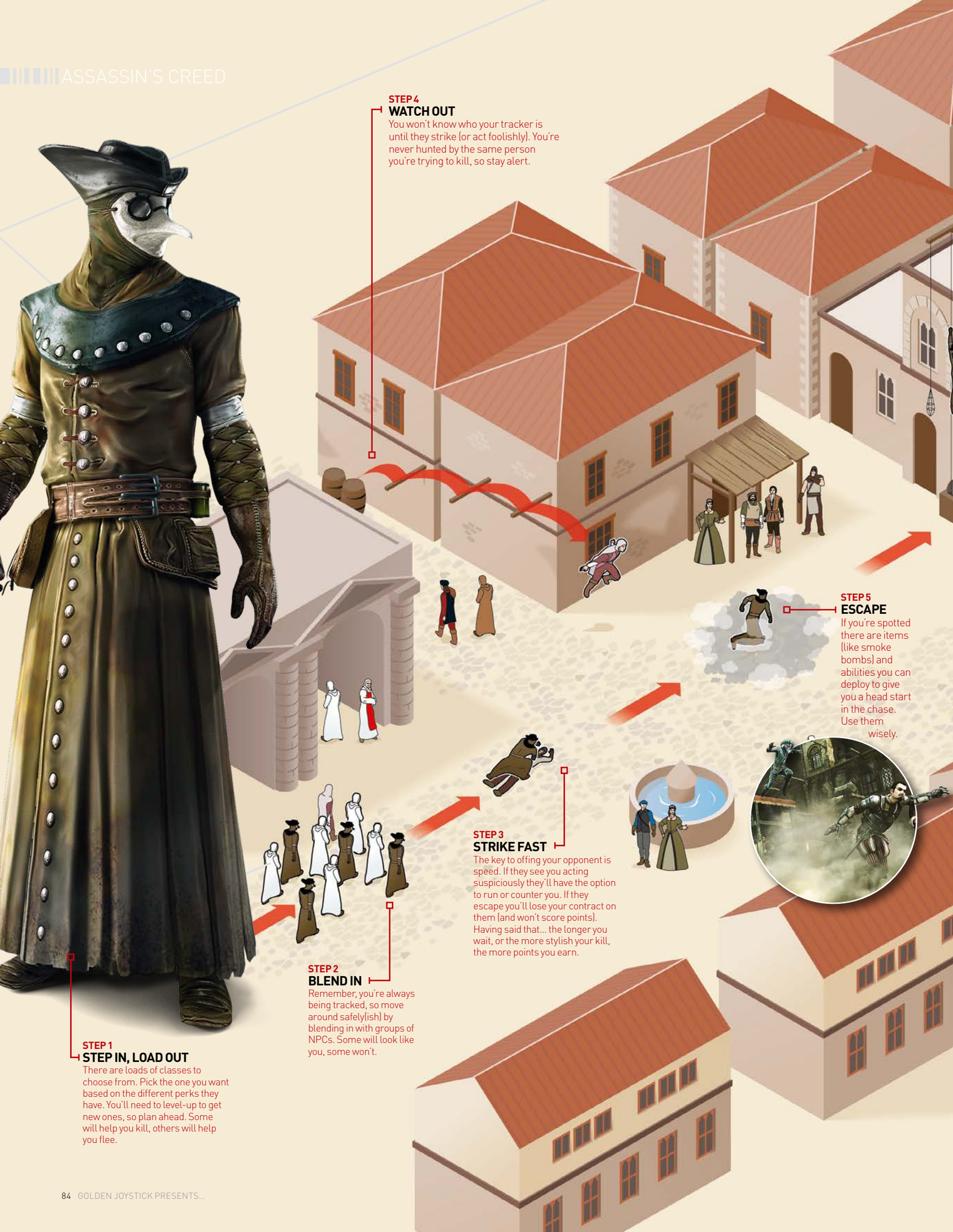
And, if you're wondering what's happened to multiplayer or co-op in Syndicate then Ubisoft has put it on the bench for now. Technological progression has made Assassin's Creed's huge open-world scale more and more demanding. It's a tough call but Ubi had to make a choice: use valuable resources to include an online mode and risk taking away from the single player, or throw everything it had at the main campaign to make it the best it could be. "We want to spend all our time on making sure the single-player is excellent," explains Ubisoft CEO Yves Guillemot. While creative director Marc-Alexis Cote says the move was to "really focus on the roots of the franchise," adding that "nine studios focused on [the] single-player experience," highlighting just how much work currently goes into creating Assassin's Creed.

But it's not the end. Some sort of multiplayer specific title is planned, although Yves Guillemot has stated that "we can't say yet about what will happen next". Given the success of Ubisoft's past online creations within the universe however, the idea of a purely multiplayer-focused game is an exciting one. So let's hope they fire up a party-sized Animus soon.

ABOVE
You'll aways eye characters suspiciously when they walk past

FAR LEFT
Always be sure when trying a kill - after that you're exposed

LEFT
You're always a hunter... but you're always being hunted too



STEP 1
STEP IN, LOAD OUT
There are loads of classes to choose from. Pick the one you want based on the different perks they have. You'll need to level-up to get new ones, so plan ahead. Some will help you kill, others will help you flee.

STEP 2
BLEND IN
Remember, you're always being tracked, so move around safely(ish) by blending in with groups of NPCs. Some will look like you, some won't.

STEP 3
STRIKE FAST
The key to offing your opponent is speed. If they see you acting suspiciously they'll have the option to run or counter you. If they escape you'll lose your contract on them (and won't score points). Having said that... the longer you wait, or the more stylish your kill, the more points you earn.

STEP 4
WATCH OUT
You won't know who your tracker is until they strike (or act foolishly). You're never hunted by the same person you're trying to kill, so stay alert.

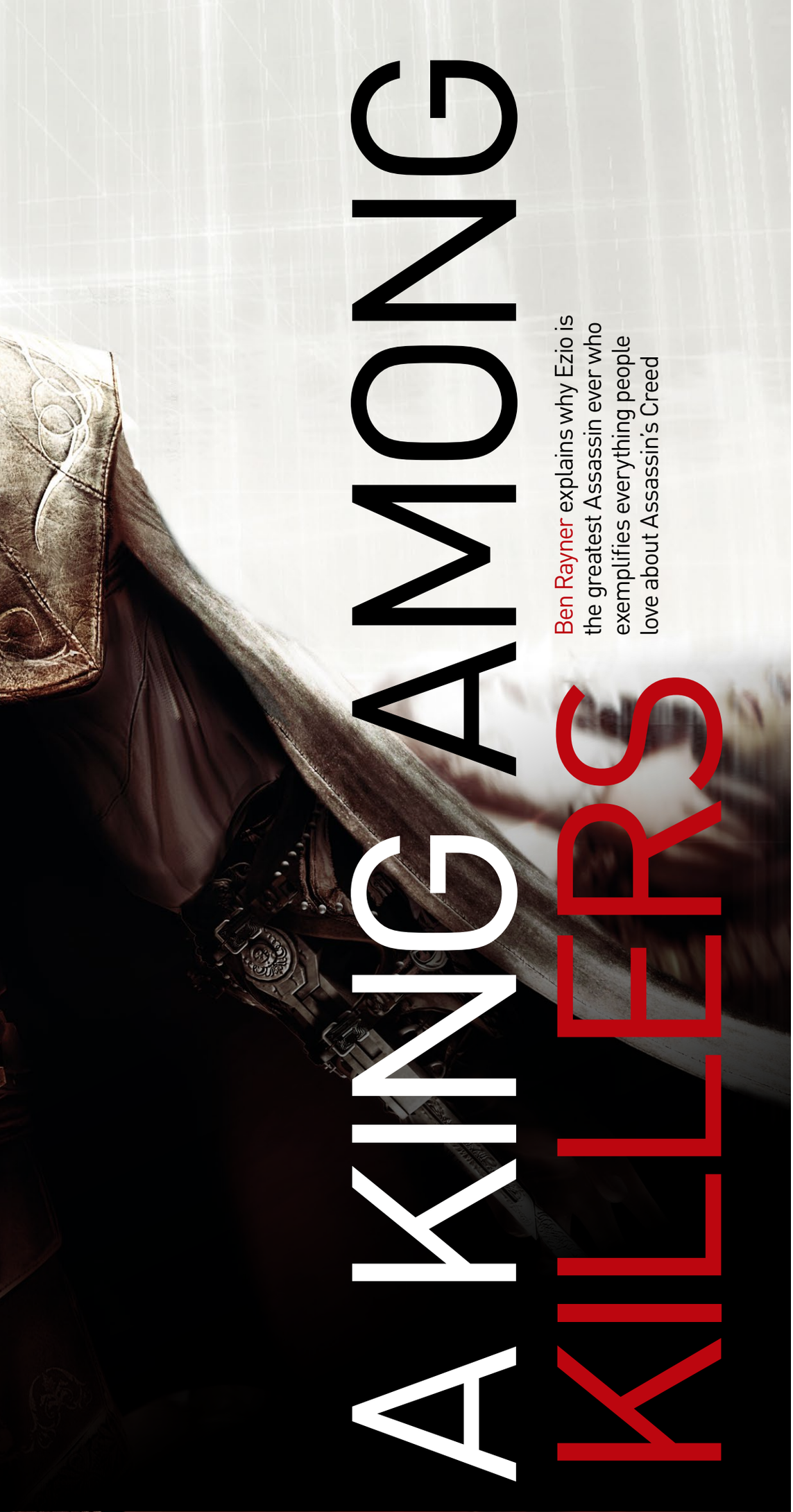
STEP 5
ESCAPE
If you're spotted there are items (like smoke bombs) and abilities you can deploy to give you a head start in the chase. Use them wisely.

HOW TO PERFORM THE PERFECT KILL IN ASSASSIN'S CREED MULTIPLAYER

A handy, stab-by-stab guide

STEP 6
GET OUT OF SIGHT
If you're being chased you can make a successful escape by breaking line of sight and staying hidden for a while (just like in single player). Our advice? Head to rooftops or use chase-breakers to put barriers

STEP 7
NEVER SAFE
So you've escaped the attention of one attacker? There will always be someone else looking to kill you, which is the tense beauty of Assassin's Creed's multiplayer.



A KING AMONG KILLERS

Ben Rayner explains why Ezio is the greatest Assassin ever who exemplifies everything people love about Assassin's Creed

Choosing your favourite character in any story is usually a difficult task. But with the Assassins Creed franchise there's a real difference of opinion. The series has thrown up a number of genuinely likeable protagonists, and the appearance of Jacob and Evie in Syndicate will likely fuel the debate even further.

I've spent some serious time mulling it over though, and I think the answer to 'who is the best Assassin' is actually pretty simple. The best Assassin is the one who has starred in the most games so far, literally embodying the phrase 'back by popular demand'. Gamers know his name whether they're fans of the series or not, he brought about some of the biggest and best changes known to the series, has the most awesome friends and is so cool that men want to be him while women want to be with him. At least, that's what years of playing games with macho archetypes has taught me. Ahem.

Here's why I think Ezio Auditore is king of the Assassins.

SOAR LIKE AN EAGLE

After playing as Altair and Desmond, who are both about as vanilla as Mr Whippy ice cream, Ezio Auditore was a breath of fresh air. He offers up some of the funniest and most charismatic moments the series has ever seen, and – for me – created the same vibe I got the first time I saw RDJ step into the boots of Iron man. Ezio starts as a well-to-do, and extremely cocky, teenager with whom we get to enjoy a front row seat as he grows up and discovers a purpose, striving to build the brotherhood and answer life's most serious questions. Ezio becomes our tour guide of Renaissance Italy as his journey spirals into an enthralling tale of vengeance, suspicion, love and treachery.

Before his tale starts in earnest, our introduction to Ezio is that of a Bond movie combined with an American teen comedy. Ever the ladies man, after worming his way into the heart and bed of his love >>

interest and then fleeing from her enraged father, he quickly gathers the troops and starts a gang fight with his most hated rival. Not before racing his brother to the top of one of Florence's tallest churches.

Sure he gets clipped by a rock which leaves a lasting scar on his lip but that's what happens when you scrap on the streets. The point of all this is that you instantly like Ezio, his rogueish charms creating an immediate positive relationship between player and protagonist.

From these rebellious beginnings, it's Ezios cocky streak that leads him to eventually push his abilities and the Assassins order to new heights. Knowing nothing of his heritage, Ezio only takes up the mantle of Assassin after seeing his father and two brothers hung. His attitude is very much 'how hard can it be?' which is the thought process he applies to everything thereafter. Vowing revenge (and to protect his mother and sister) Ezio not only sharpens his skills at a speed that would make a Rocky training montage look like an evening of watching paint dry, he goes about building a large brotherhood across Europe. That's the condensed version of ACII – a game that ends with a formerly cocky teenager tracking down and punching the Pope into bloody submission.

We share that journey with him throughout the course of the second game, and witness his development from raw, angry youngster to a man with the weight of the world and the fate of the Assassins firmly on his shoulders. The whole 30 hour journey is about Ezio (or it certainly appears that way), which is why we develop such a bond with him. Unlike most games, we're not simply presented with a pre-set hero and told to like him. Our abilities and association with the game develop alongside Ezio; a powerful narrative trick, for sure.

Ezio isn't just a killer, either – he has a clear motive for joining the Creed, but we see in Brotherhood the personal sacrifices this commitment forces onto him. The flashback sequences that show him giving up on love and finishing the scrap with his boyhood rival in a tragically lethal fashion add depth to Ezio's story that was sadly skimmed over in ACII. Again, it shows the player that he's a human being going through a difficult life, rather than a cold murderer. Does Ezio regret the rash decision he makes to don the Assassin cowl and avenge the murder of his family? While it's never explicitly said, I get the impression that he does question his decisions. Like the rest of us, he makes mistakes and has to deal with the consequences.

You cant talk about Ezio without mentioning the brotherhood. Every Assassin after Ezio's reign has largely used this hooded gang as a vehicle to meet their own goals and as an endless supply of free assistance, but with Ezio they're practically (and literally) his family.

In Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood this mechanic is explored as Ezio builds the skills of his fellow Assassins, sending them on missions to help others and to grow the order. In turn, if you're in a bind then your brothers are ready to jump in with an axe or hidden blade, all at the sound of your whistle. This is a direct contrast to Connor, who seems to view the brotherhood as a burden (much like everything else), or Edward who is reluctant to accept his heritage and responsibility at all. Ezio is the living embodiment of a committed member of the

What Happens: ACII

After seeing his father and brothers executed, Ezio vows revenge and quickly takes his mother and sister to safety. He sets on a journey that will see him recover the Apple of Eden from the Templars and lead the brotherhood to their golden era.

Assassins, and it's only really now – with Evie – that we see another protagonist putting the group ahead of the individual.

But it isn't all business with Ezio. He retains a sense of fun and playfulness and this flows through everything from the actions he takes to the clothes he wears. None of those plain white robes of the original AC for this guy. Ezio prefers to rock a bright red cape with lots of gold all over it. Versace, Gucci and Valentino followed in this Italian Assassin's footsteps. And who remembers the moment in ACII where he suggests adding milk to coffee, thereby inventing the latte?

We see this affability in the way Ezio interacts with his friends too, which in turn throws out believable relationships which drive the narrative of the 'Ezio trilogy'. During ACII he becomes best buds with none other than Leonardo Da Vinci, who goes on to build some of the best tools the Assassins could have asked for. The most notable is obviously the iconic and doubly deadly dual Hidden Blades. The Flying Machine is another favourite, as it mixes up the traditional on-foot stealth / action to develop the series into a more varied open-world adventure. Plus, what other Assassin can say they practically invented flight? Well, kinda. Fan theories even suggest that Leonardo has a crush on Ezio, although Ubisoft has never publicly admitted this is the case. The two definitely develop an excellent friendship, invoking that classic Bond/Q dynamic.

Christopher Columbus' expedition to the New World was made all the more possible thanks to Ezio saving his life, not once but twice, from Templar leaders who would rather see the New World left for their own members of the order to discover. This act alone was pivotal, AC III would have been a very different story if things had played out differently.

Ercole Massimo's Cult of Hermes was also extinguished by the Italian master assassin, which in turn led to the Assassins' ideals making their way throughout Italy. At the risk of flogging a dead horse, my point is that Ezio single-handedly did more for the Assassins as an order, than any other member we've yet to play as. That's quite an achievement.

TOP LEFT
Ezio may be 50+ in Revelations, but the guy still has some moves

BOTTOM LEFT
See that, Kenways? Ezio was on a boat long before any of you guys!

ABOVE
While Revelations has bum notes (Tower Defence) it's a fine AC game

> WE WITNESS EZIO'S JOURNEY, AND SEE HIS DEVELOPMENT FROM RAW YOUNGSTER TO MASTER ASSASSIN

What Happens: Brotherhood

Mistakenly thinking his work was done, Brotherhood sees a now more seasoned Ezio head to Rome in order to crush the Borgia family and bring the city into modern day wealth. All with the help of some 'enemies of the state'.

What Happens: Revelations

For his final act, Ezio travels to the city of Constantinople for clues to a hidden secret library of Altair Ibn-La'ahad. It's amidst the turmoil of the rise of the Ottoman Empire where Ezio meets his future wife, Sophia.

OLDER AND WISER

As you might expect, Ezio doesn't let his age slow him down and Revelations sees him searching Constantinople for clues to a fabled hidden library, buried in the long forgotten Fortress of Masyaf. Eventually travelling there only to find it overrun with Templars, an ageing Ezio fights them off single handedly and unlocks the library before retiring. Sort of. In his final act – only revealed in short animated film, Embers – Ezio trains Chinese Assassin Shao Jun (the star of Assassins Creed Chronicles: China) before settling down in his seat to die with quiet dignity in the presence of his family.

Ubisoft has been struggling to surpass Ezio ever since. In fact, his demise left a hole in the series that has proven difficult to fill. Connor Kenway was a deliberate attempt to create an anti-Ezio character – a poe-faced warrior who spoke through his actions rather than his one-liners. The experiment fell flat, but in my book, the introduction of Edward Kenway as a drunken rogue went too far the other way. There is none of Ezio's dignity in Edward, and while the latter makes for a first-class pirate, he's definitely a second-rate Assassin. And Arno Dorian? He's likeable but feels like a budget Ezio, forever doomed to walk in the Italian legend's shadow.

Interestingly, Syndicate is the only game to equal Ezio's star-power, but it does so by spreading his traits across two main protagonists. While Jacob evokes Ezio's boldness and cocky nature, Evie represents the more serious 'traditional Assassin' side of things. It's a smart way to divide up the characteristics fans love in Ezio, and a large part of the reason Syndicate is one of the best AC games in recent years.

Ezio, then, a character often immitated but never bettered. A hero, a rogue, and the true star of the Assassin's Creed series.

PRINCE AMONG THIEVES

Wait? Is Ezio really the best Assassin in the series? **Sam White** explains why Edward Kenway deserves his praise too...

As a naval privateer, a scoundrel pirate, an unlikely legendary assassin... and a Welshman... Edward Kenway is perhaps the most surprising of heroes to have reinvigorated the smile, wit and flair of the Assassin's Creed universe. Yet that's exactly what he does in Black Flag.

After Ezio Auditore da Firenze lit up the Italian renaissance – and subsequently the sun-soaked cityscape of 16th century Constantinople – in a series mini-arc that spanned three entire games, the Assassin's Creed bloodline took a poe-faced turn for a bit. After Assassin's Creed III – a much more serious, pontificating affair that took itself too seriously and lost its sense of humour – Black Flag took us in a different direction again, to discover the swashbuckling fun of the West Indies, with one of the series' best games, and arguably the most accomplished pirating simulator in gaming history.

ALL SHIP-SHAPE

Good old assassin pirate Ed Kenway lies at the centre of this reinvigorated personality; the game's lighthearted and playful tone is entirely down to his fantastic central performance as a cheeky chappy who is reckless but not unlikeable. He's a lothario, much like Ezio was when he was prancing about Florence or Rome, and also an egotist who's overly ambitious, hungry for the potential of fame and glory that the treasure-plundering pirate life can bring him. But, importantly, he never lets that greed come in the way of doing good things for good causes. By toeing that fine line between chasing self-interest as a rogue, and a hero prepared to go as far as he needs to in order to do what's required of him, he becomes a standout for the entire Assassin's Creed line-up. He's a role model, just like Ezio.

Off the back of Assassin's Creed III's Connor – the weakest Assassin in the entire series so let's not talk too much about him – Black Flag made substantial improvements to its portrayal of central characters, and Kenway was a return to form for the series' long line of history-hopping heroes. The franchise has often struggled to create personalities you can take seriously – who you can believe in, whose cause is compelling, and who you can understand their justifications (but without evangelising the cause to the point that we, as an audience, become detached and stop caring about the character behind the mission). Ezio was long the highlight of the series, but Kenway getting pissed with his mateys on the beautiful white sands of the Caribbean, singing sea shanties on the azure blue waves before sailing off into the sunset, revitalised our hopes for a truly human character to root for in an Assassin's Creed game.

THE ANTI-ASSASSIN?

Black Flag's pirating is such a welcome change of pace, giving you the space to not be an Assassin from time to time; not to chase your next target to kill, not to follow the next lead to investigate, or not to care about the world-changing schemes of the Templar regime. Instead, Black Flag gives us time to get to know the character of Edward Kenway, and become one with his ship, the Jackdaw, and its merry band of crewmates – exploring a beautiful world, finding treasures and seeing what life is like outside cultist ordeals.

For a series so renowned for such huge worlds, Assassin's Creed elevated its philosophy of the open-world with Black Flag. Its freeform approach to exploration – looting underwater wrecks, staring at gorgeous Caribbean vistas, discovering secret atolls, or getting into thrilling Master & Commander naval battles with huge Spanish ships – these emergent moments defined the beginning of a new generation of consoles, and remain as superlative high points in the series.

None of this would've worked without Kenway's personality and charm, which has left its mark emblazoned on Assassin's Creed ever since. His reception as such a fantastic lead inspired Ubisoft to go so much further with the characterisation of its main protagonists, and you can see much of those learnings in both Unity and this year's Syndicate. We have a lot to thank Ed for, although we'd never tell him – cocky sod.

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MEMORY SEQUENCE #3
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ASSASSIN'S CREED COSPLAY GALLERY

THE ART OF

Delving into Assassin's Creed: A Visual History

ASSASSIN'S CREED

AN ASSASSIN PRINCE
These early concept images from artist Khai Nguyen look strikingly similar to Ubisoft's previous big hitter, Prince of Persia. Yet even in the early days of the series, this collection shows the importance of the Eagle in Assassin imagery and the power of the hood/gauntlet combo. Creed art wouldn't be complete without a feathered friend and brooding hood shot.

COVER UP
Although the first in the series lacked a lot of the stealth we now take for granted - ironic for a game called Assassin's Creed - it's clear that this was the goal from the very beginning. Each iteration of the game has taken steps forward to achieve new levels of sneaky stabbing. While Altair couldn't automatically sneak into cover, it's something that Jacob and Evie do with ease.

HIGH TIMES
It wouldn't be the Creed we know and love if there were no stomach clenching climbs up to the nearest viewpoint. From Altair and Ezio all the way to London's criminal twins, there's nothing true Assassins love more than clambering up walls and trying desperately not to Leap Of Faith in the wrong direction. Here's to there always being well-positioned hay carts.

HORSE PLAY
Assassins aren't much without their equine friends and from the Middle Ages onwards they have been vital to the brotherhood. In AC, Altair can ride horses between locations and Ezio does the same in ACII. Brotherhood however allows you to enter cities and clatter through the streets of Rome. A mere whistle from Ezio will alert your trusty steed. Handy.

CARIBBEAN CRUISE
The coastal cities of Havana, Kingston and Nassau in Black Flag deliver a very different atmosphere for the series. These concept images from artist Donglu Yu show a vibrant colour palette and bright sunshine. After the dull cities of New York and Boston in Assassin's Creed III, Edward's world is bright and cheerful and yes, of course there's plenty of rum.

HAVANA LAUGH
While Black Flag spends more time at sea than rubbing shoulders with land lubbers, Ubi still had to make sure that the cities were as historically accurate as ever. The top image is an early concept of Havana Cathedral, showing that the 'History is our playground' tagline is still an important feature of the series. Someone, somewhere knows that looks perfect.

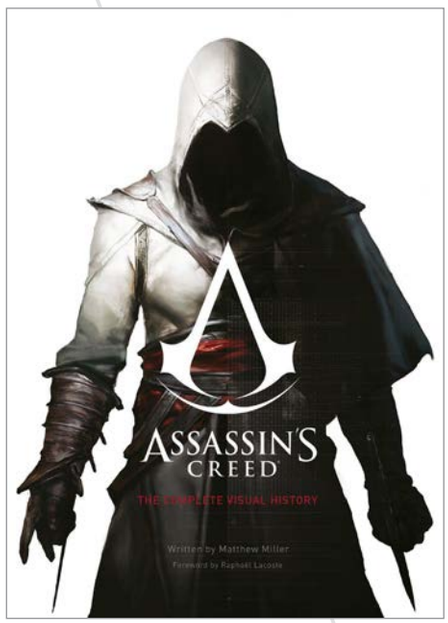
THE TRAVELLER
These images of an older, more grizzled Ezio Auditore are for Assassin's Creed Revelations. From the sunny climes of Venice and Florence, Ezio travels to Constantinople during the rise of the Ottoman Empire. His clothing changes accordingly, with these images from character artist Jeff Simpson giving him detailed Ottoman embroidery and much heavier travelling fabrics.

FEELING FRESH
The biggest hurdle faced by the Creed's character artists is the creation of something that feels new and exciting for the player. Not only does it need to feel updated and fresh but also hold onto the traditions of the series. Cue much anger at the removal of a permanent hood for Assassin's Creed Syndicate and the request for a toggle to reimplement the sneaky feature.

MASTER OF DISGUISE
Revelations sees Ezio not just hurtling across the Constantinople skyline wearing his traditional robes but disguising himself in various costumes. In a memorable sequence he sneaks into a party dressed as a charming singing minstrel. He also dons the outift of a Janissary soldier to infiltrate an enemy camp. If one thing is clear it's that Ezio really loves cosplay.

All of these images are from Assassin's Creed: The Complete Visual History. Written by journalist Matthew Miller, this is a hardback collection of art from across the series and features a foreword from Ubisoft brand art director Raphael Lacoste. With slews of hooded art from every game in the franchise it also has unique interviews with character and concept artists.

The book includes content created for the extended Assassin's Creed universe featured in graphic novels and DLC, as well as in depth character analysis behind the designs of every main Assassin since Altair graced our screens. Assassin's Creed: The Complete Visual History is published by Insight Editions in the USA and Titan Books in the UK.



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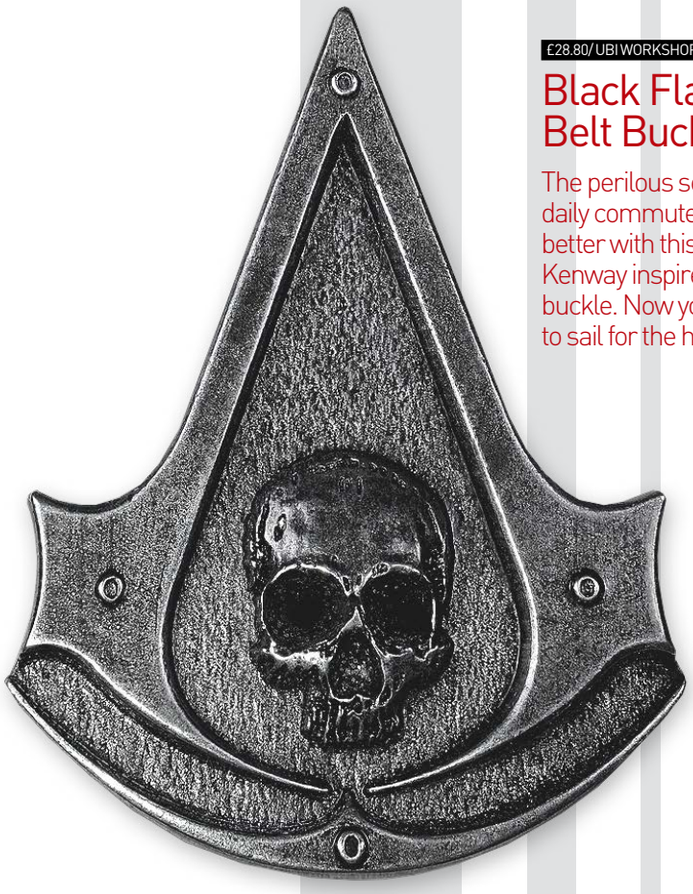

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Yes, this print from artist AJ Hateley is how you sneak Assassin's art onto your walls without anyone noticing. It's a bit like blending. But with frames.

£189/MUSTERBAND

Jacob and Evie coats

These his and hers coats from German merch pros Musterbrand feature interchangeable buttons for when you need to be less of an Assassin and the iconic hood is removable. Rooking good.

£224/VOLANTE DESIGNS

Assassin's Creed Eagle coat

Made by hand by US-based Volante Designs, the Eagle comes in a variety of colours that include Revolutionary, Byzantine Red and Gilded Onyx. Free-running skills not included.

£8.99/FORBIDDEN PLANET

Assassin's Creed Funko POP! Figurines

These bubble headed members of the Brotherhood are almost too adorable to know what to do with. D'awwwww, wook at their wittle hoods! Death by cute.

£17.30/AMAZON

Assassin's Creed wallet

All that silver you've been looting needs a place to live so look no further than this wallet. The interior even has a clear ID pouch so no need for Eagle Vision.

£34.99 /GAME

Assassin's Creed Syndicate Cane Sword

Put a scythe blade in your step with this full size cane, complete with hidden (plastic) sword. Best not to think what would happen if it was real.

£29.99 EACH/ GAME

The Wise and Wild Twins

The two individual models 'The Intrepid Sister' and 'The Impetuous Brother' fit together in a diorama that shows our new favourite Templar stabbers ready to go. Either that or Jacob is going golfing.

£26.99/MERCHOID

Jacob's Top Hat

Want to look as dapper as Mr Frye himself? Then you'll be looking for this fully-lined head gear. Spectacular mutton chops not included.

£39/UBI WORKSHOP

The Vial

Designed by Those Who Came Before, these blood vials were stored in the Observatory discovered by Edward Kenway in Black Flag. Now they can be on your bookshelf.

£29.99/GAME

Assassin's Creed Syndicate Monopoly

Take London back from those pesky Blighters or y'know, your family and friends. Just make sure no one gets stabbed in the Community Chest.

£17.50/UBI WORKSHOP

Legacy Collection Bronze Ezio Auditore

What better way to remember the legendary Renaissance Master Assassin than this bronze bust? Ideal for the fireplace in your luxury Italian villa.

£17.50/UBI WORKSHOP

Master Assassin Ring

Join the Brotherhood without having to remove a finger and no diving off viewpoints required. Maybe onto the sofa as a token gesture.

£34.99/MERCHANDISE MONKEY

Syndicate Backpack

Because we don't have invisible inventory space. However, if Jacob or Evie were to have a backpack, it would probably look like like this fashionable roll top.

£110/UBI WORKSHOP

Desmond hoodie and bag

The Nolan North voiced Desmond Miles is Assassin flavoured Marmite when it comes to people's favourite characters. Regardless, you can't say he had bad taste in clothing. Oh, you can...

£19.50/ UBI WORKSHOP

Templar Necklace

Show your allegiance to the villainous Templars with this neck gear... and you'd better start listening out for whispers. Don't expect to last long.

£34.99 /YELLOW BULLDOG

Numskull Christmas Jumper

Tis the season to be stabby fa la la la la... Have yourself a Dickensian cosy Christmas carol in this jumper complete with falling snow, prancing reindeers and Syndicate logo.

A VIEW TO A KILL

With the bladed Brotherhood set to free-run onto the big screen in 2016 here's everything you need to know about the Assassin's Creed movie, and what it has to do to be great

It is a truth universally acknowledged, that all game-based movies are bobbins. The reasons aren't always clear cut. Sometimes beloved series are saddled with a script that sort of fits the bill for the sake of name recognition (see: House Of The Dead) but not spirit, the film-makers trusted to adapt games for the screen often aren't up to scratch, and games are rarely treated with the same respect as comics or novels by Hollywood. How else do you explain the risible Super Mario Bros movie?

The Assassin's Creed film is going to be different. In fact, we'd put good money on it being the first great movie based on a video game (or the second if Duncan Jones can make good with Warcraft). There are several reasons why. First and foremost is its star Michael Fassbender. He's among the most talented and in-demand actors in the world; the kind who doesn't need to work simply for the paycheque, and makes interesting, worthwhile choices. Take oddball drama Frank, where The Fass dons a giant Frank Sidebottom mask for the entire film, or Shame, where he's constantly getting his wanger out for his art. Not only is Fassbender starring in the Assassin's Creed movie, he's also producing for the first time – a huge vote of confidence in the series.

"I think it's a really fascinating concept, just the idea of DNA memory alone," Fassbender says, even though he admits he's played the game "only a few times, badly". Fassbender is taking on double duties as 15th Century Spanish Assassin Aguilar and his modern day descendant Callum Lynch – the latter rumoured to be a death row inmate before he's saved from a lethal cocktail by Abstergo Industries and strapped to the Animus. Expect the usual mix of Assassin's vs Templars on the hunt for a First Civilisation artefact – and a tale modelled closely on the first game's journey of discovery. Fassbender also convinced his Oscar-winning Macbeth co-star Marion Cotillard to join him (as the 'main antagonist') even though she had little idea what she was getting herself in for. "Is the game violent? I don't like to shoot people!" With Brendan Gleeson and Jeremy Irons also signed up the film isn't short of acting heavyweights. A great start.

Creating entirely new characters rather than adapting an existing tale is absolutely the right choice. Doing so allows the film to be set in the same universe as the games without the risk of contradicting established events, and doesn't rule out a crowd-pleasing Ezio cameo (technically he is stabbing his way around the continent at about the same time…). And as 'cinematic' as the games aspire to be, the film needs to do something different if it hopes to succeed.

> DON'T BE SURPRISED TO SEE AT LEAST ONE LEAP OF FAITH FROM A FRIGHTENINGLY HIGH VANTAGE POINT

With Ubisoft establishing its own motion picture division to oversee Assassin's Creed (along with in-development flicks Splinter Cell, Ghost Recon and Watch Dogs), expect the film to remain faithful to the games. But crucially Ubisoft Motion Pictures CEO Jean Julien Baronnet recognises that the movie needs to blaze its own trail. In particular Baronnet has hinted that there will be a more >>

even split between historical and present day sections. "Assassin's was complicated to develop, because you're working with two time periods, one contemporary and one historical," Baronnet says. "Generally in a film, you only have one hero. And with the link between the past and the present, you can't have one of the stories taking precedence over the other."

Instead of smothering film-makers with its vision, Ubisoft is giving Fassbender and co the autonomy to do their jobs. "We told [Fassbender] that we were going to build the project together," Barronet says, "That we have an enormous brand and we want to make a film modelled on features like Batman Begins or Blade Runner. We promised him that he could work with the scriptwriters, that we were going to bring him into all the key creative choices."

Batman Begins is an apt film to invoke in relation to 'Creed's director, Justin Kurzel who – like Christopher Nolan before he took on the Dark Knight – is a critical darling one blockbuster away from a place among the biggest film-makers on the planet. Kurzel helmed exceptional indie drama Snowtown before going on to direct the superb, recently released adaptation of Macbeth. Among many other qualities, Macbeth has gorgeous, earthy cinematography. If Assassin's Creed looks even half as good as Macbeth (quite likely given that Kurzel brought his cinematographer Adam Arkapaw with him) then it'll be visually spectacular at the very least. Fassbender enlisted Kurzel after their experience working together on the Scottish Pla... er, film.

"It's a genre I never thought I'd be involved in – it scares the bejeesus out of me! – but it's really interesting," Kurzel says. "The last six months have been all about story, creating really engaging characters and taking interesting things from the game. We're trying to make a film that's not only going to connect with the fanbase but also with people who are not familiar with the game."

This is an important point – Assassin's Creed is being made to appeal to the series' legion of fans, but it also has to work for an audience that hasn't swan-dived into a cart full of hay countless times over the last eight years. This is partly driven by the film's budget, with Baronnet indicating that 20th Century Fox are spending an eye-watering $150-200 million making it – as much as the average mega-budget superhero movie. "Our big gamble is that it works for three audiences," Barronet says. "Fans of our games, which there are some 95 million of; fans of mainstream cinema who are going to see Star Wars and Spider-Man; and in parallel, we're also aiming it at people who would never think of going to see an Assassin's film... people who like independent films."

Hollywood isn't in the business of taking risks, so for 20th Century Fox to be investing 'Avengers bucks' is a clear sign of confidence. The film also boasts an important industry

Taking The Michael

With his wolf grin and magnetic charisma, German-Irish actor Michael Fassbender is one cinema's brightest stars. After his feature debut in comic adaptation 300, Fassbender quickly established a name for himself as one of the most exciting screen presences. As Bobby Sands in Steve McQueen's award winning drama Hunger, Fassbender went to extraordinary lengths to play an imprisoned IRA activist on hunger strike – a role which no doubt caught the eye of Quentin Tarantino, who cast him in Inglorious Basterds two years later. He's no stranger to blockbusters either having played a young Magneto (brilliantly) in the last two X-Men films and fantastically odd android David in the otherwise duff Prometheus. Most recently he brought Steve Jobs to the screen in Danny Boyle and Aaron Sorkin's celebrated biopic. Crucially for Assassin's Creed, he's the kind of actor with the dramatic chops and the physicality to pull off the challenging dual role of 15th Century Assassin and unwitting modern day hero. The series is in safe hands.

FAR LEFT
Kurzel's last film, Macbeth, impressed

LEFT
Ezio will feature in the Assassin's Creed movie. Excellent

> YOU KNOW THE MAKERS HAVE A TIME-HOPPING TRILOGY PLANNED, IF THIS MAKES A KILLING AT THE BOX-OFFICE

veteran behind the scenes in Frank Marshall, Steven Spielberg's long time producing partner who most recently worked on Jurassic World. In other words, forget the discount adaptations of Hitman and Max Payne, Assassin's Creed is a proper tentpole blockbuster, with the globetrotting shoot travelling to locations in Malta, Spain and London (hello, Syndicate).

They're taking their time to get it right too. Assassin's Creed was originally due to be released in summer 2015, but was pushed back over a year rather than rush to meet a release date. The fact that the film is coming out in the kind of slot typically reserved for only the biggest blockbusters (think Star Wars, Avatar, and Lord Of The Rings) is another sign that the studio expects big things from it.

The series' trademark free-running should make an elegant transition to the screen. "There's parkour and free running; it's not superhero; it's action that's accessible, relatable," says Kurzel. And he's right. Creed's action could be captured almost entirely in-camera, with little need to resort to illusion-shattering CG doubles, offering the same visceral thrills as the parkour sequence in Casino Royale. If the phenomenal success of Mad Max: Fury Road proved anything it's that audiences are craving blockbusters with a tangible sense of danger, so don't be surprised to see at least one leap of faith from a frighteningly high vantage point.

With little other than a picture of Fassbender in costume as Aguilar to go off (as marvellous as it is) and a few pap shots floating around online, it's hard to tell exactly how the film will turn out, but every sign points towards it being not only a good game adaptation but a great film regardless of its origins. And with franchises the biggest things on the planet right now, you know the makers have at least a time-hopping trilogy planned if it makes a killing at the box office.

Tooling Up

There are plenty of opportunities to slip some weapon-based Easter eggs into Assassin's Creed – here are some familiar favourites we'd like to see.

HIDDEN BLADES

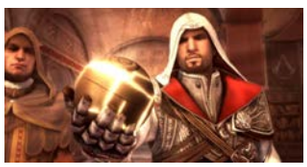
Bit of a cheat this one because we know they'll appear in the film but importantly we want to see Aguilar get creative with them, employing Ezio's ultra-satisfying double assassination from Assassin's Creed 2 (see pic left).

ALMOGAVAR AXE

The Bearded Axe (with it's pointed back end) is arguably the more iconic weapon, but the Almogavar looks exquisitely brutal, and can hack through armour like papier mâché. No wonder some guards flee when it's drawn.

ALTAIR'S SHORT BLADE

Apart from looking lovely, short blades also offer the advantage of the user being able to wield throwing knifes at the same time, which could make for some impressively fancy kills.



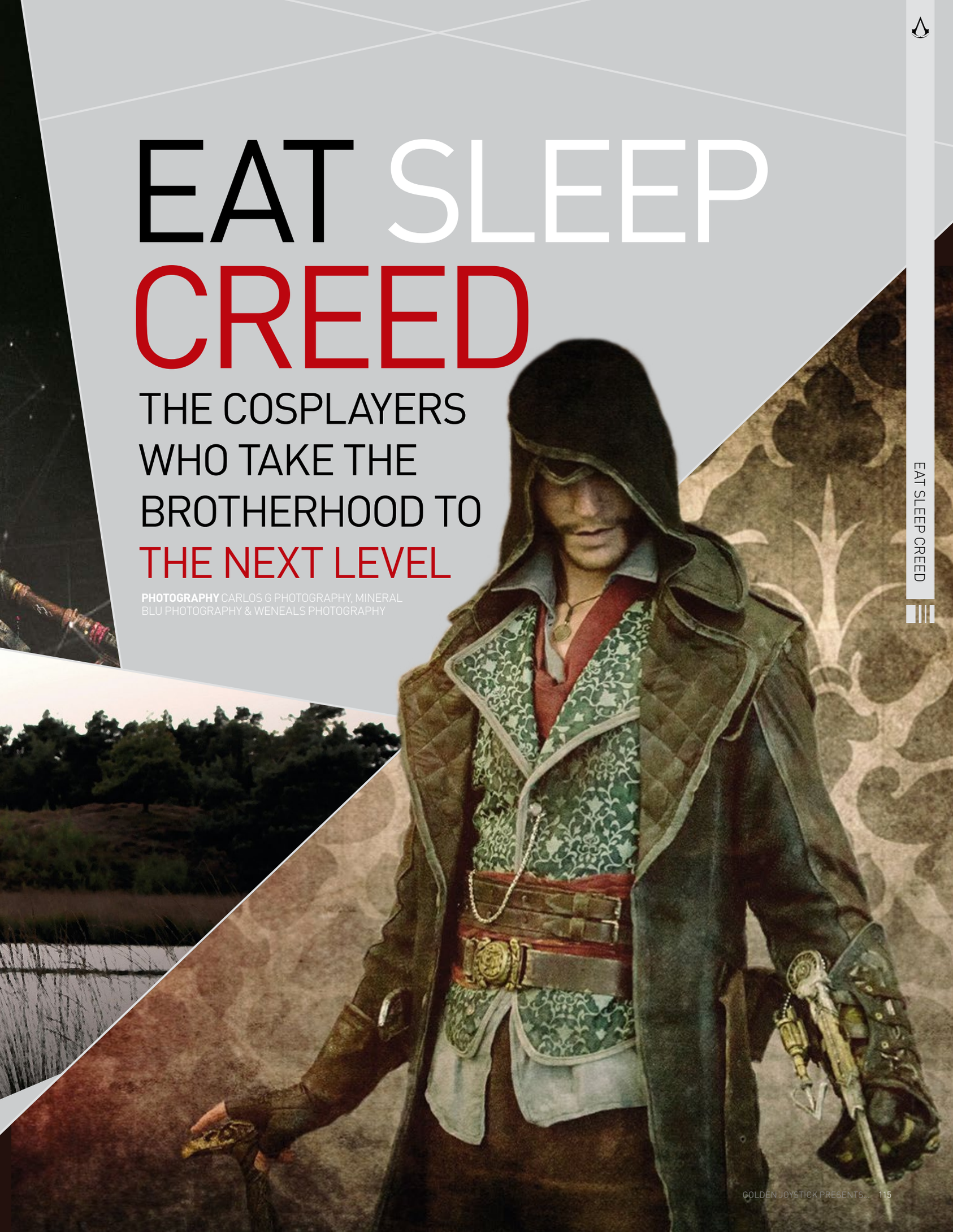
APPLE OF EDEN

It's a safe bet that the Assassins and the Templars are chasing a Piece of Eden in the movie, so why not make it the film's ultimate weapon? At the very least it would give them a chance to splash out on special effects.

EAT SLEEP CREED

THE COSPLAYERS WHO TAKE THE BROTHERHOOD TO THE NEXT LEVEL

PHOTOGRAPHY CARLOS G PHOTOGRAPHY, MINERAL BLU PHOTOGRAPHY & WENEALS PHOTOGRAPHY



JAMIE OAKLEY UK

So it turns out that if you put your mind to it there Ar...no limits (get it? Arno! Because the character… oh, never mind) when it comes to creating the perfect Assassin outfit. Creed Cosplay founder, Jamie Oakley from Hampshire, crafts all of his own getups by hand."I've not long got into Assassin's Creed," Oakley admits. "I was never really a big gamer until a couple of years ago. But after playing Assassin's Creed II at a friend's place, I got hooked. I love the storylines. A great game to me is one where you have feelings for a character and Assassin's Creed does that."

Oakley's first Assassin cosplay was Ratonhnhaké:ton himself, Connor Kenway, and he was inspired by a professional to pick up the K-man's tomahawk. "I just fell in love with Connor's outfit. I looked online and saw the price to buy and it was way too pricy for my liking," Jamie explains. "Then I came across Rick Boer's Connor. Originally I thought he was a model hired to wear Connor's outfit. My mind was blown when I found out he made the costume. I sent him a message saying something along the lines of: 'Wow, I wish I could make something like that.' He replied and said: 'You can only try. That's what I did'. Challenge accepted!"

Now with Connor, Edward, Arno and Jacob under his Master Assassin belt, Oakley still makes everything by hand and attends all the UK conventions as part of the Assassin's Cosplay Brotherhood. They like comparing blades apparently.

SEE MORE http://bit.ly/accreedcosplay

RICK & DOMINIQUE BOER Netherlands

Couples cosplay? Pah. This pair of Assassins take things to a whole new level. Originally a regular convention-goer as the very first playable Assassin, Altair, Rick Boer was spotted by Ubisoft at an event. "I love the series and I thought it would be cool to make his costume," says Boer. "At the FACTS convention in Belgium, Ubisoft BE spotted me. They kept me in mind and decided to get me back in when AC III was coming up."

The Connor costume took four months to build, and Boer created it from the studs up in his spare time – but it was never the plan for his wife Dominique to join in. As we see, though, her impact had a big impact. "Connor was nearly done when Ubisoft showed Aveline and we were sitting on the couch looking at her saying, 'Did they do this on purpose?!' My wife is of mixed heritage, as is Aveline. Just when I thought I was done, I started unpacking my tools again."

Representing Connor and Aveline has really changed how the couple feel about the games and they haven't stopped since. Arno and Elise were ripe for the picking and now they've worked with Ubisoft for Jacob and Evie Frye. "When people get married they usually do a romantic photoshoot," says Boer. "Now, our marriage isn't to be compared to any game related experience, but how long does it take to buy a wedding dress and a suit? I've worked on these costumes for months, and to look at pictures where [we're] dressed up is amazing! Assassin's Creed has become something more for us than just a game."

SEE MORE http://rbf-productions-nl.deviantart.com

MONIKA LEE USA

After cosplaying as Blackbeard from Black Flag at San Diego Comic Con in 2013, Monika Lee decided to up her game and go full hooded hero with a hand made Arno Dorian outfit. Despite her favourite sneaky Templar-stabber being a certain pirate, she decided on the suave French Revolution Assassin. "I actually hadn't thought to cosplay Edward when Black Flag came out because it was kind of taboo in the cosplay community to gender swap a character (for fear of people typifying it 'sexy Edward' or 'sexy Ezio'—which still happens)," explains Lee. "But then as more and more people started cosplaying different gendered characters, I was kind of like, 'who the hell cares?!' and decided that Arno would be a great opportunity to finally cosplay an Assassin from the series."

And yes, that is all hand made. "My Arno took probably about a month or so. I worked around my work schedule," she explains. "The hardest part was patterning all the different layers of clothes he wears, especially to fit the female form. And for some reason, the AC dev team decided that a million buttons on Arno's clothes would be a great idea..."

Lee is a big fan of the franchise and can see why so many people choose to get their hood up in celebration. "I think the appeal of the Assassin's Creed series comes from its presence in every culture and timeline," she says. "There's this sort of confidence and stealth swagger that all the Assassins have that's very compelling. Also cloaks and hoods make you feel like a badass!"

SEE MORE http://bit.ly/acmonikalee

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BELIEVE IT OR NOT: THE OUTRAGEOUS CONSPIRACY THEORIES THAT ASSASSIN'S CREED SAYS ARE TRUE

Ashley Reed digs into the lore to work out historical fact from fiction

If you didn't know any better, you might think that the Assassin's Creed series is about visiting historical eras, seeing the past come alive, meeting famous figures, and stabbing them in the face (assuming their face isn't inside out – ooh, sorry Unity, is it too soon for those jokes?). But that's only half the fun! In addition to focusing on the lives of various Assassins (members of a secret society with a fondness for running up walls and a deep hatred of mandolin players), the story also shows the profound effect Assassins and their Templar nemeses have had on humanity. Theirs is a secret war, fought in the shadows, with vast impacts on the world at large. Or so the Animus database entries will tell you.

Hmm, secret war, shadow-battling? Smacks of conspiracy theories, doesn't it? Well, that's not the only thing about Assassin's Creed that sounds a bit tin-hatted. The series has tons of fun incorporating some of the world's most well known conspiracy theories into its storyline, and even more fun saying they're all completely accurate. Well, as accurate as video games get.

For those not in-the-know, I have here 11 insane and rather amazing conspiracy theories that Assassin's Creed says are true, so that you may finally open your eyes! Just put this foil hat on first. It'll keep the CIA out of your brain and make you look rather fetching to your fellow commuters on the bus. You're welcome!

The Knights Templar found something on the Temple Mount

The conspiracy: Back in 1120, the Knights Templar (one of the strongest and most wealthy Crusader forces) sweet-talked their way into some swanky headquarters on the Temple Mount, one of the most important religious sites in Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. Kind of a big deal. What made it an even bigger deal was that the Temple Mount was supposedly the location of the fabled Solomon's Temple, and conspiracy theories abound that the Templars found something incredibly important there. By which I mean proof that Jesus survived the crucifixion and married Mary Magdalene.

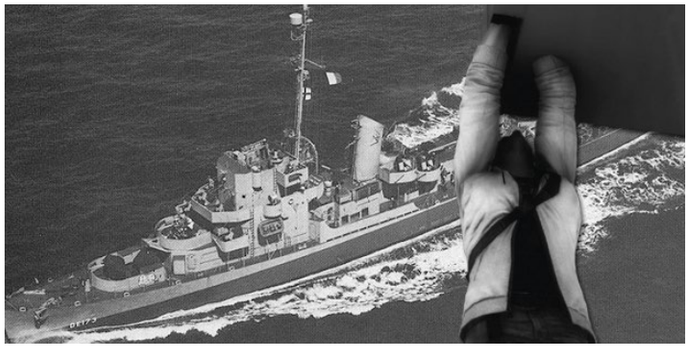
Assassin's Creed says… Not only is Solomon's Temple real, but what it contained is way crazier than some dusty old scrolls. Inside the Templars found a Piece of Eden, a tool that ancient beings used to control human minds. It was in a very lovely gold chest, too. You'd think someone would have noticed that sooner. Finding was all the Templars did with it though, since your first act in the original Assassin's Creed is to nab the thing and head for the hills. SUCKEEEEEERS.

Jesus had an heir

The conspiracy: The DaVinci Code didn't come up with this one. Questions about Jesus Christ's bloodline have existed for a very long time, though written examples started to stack up at the beginning of the 13th century. The theory goes that Jesus had a child (possibly with Mary Magdalene or some other unnamed woman) who was spirited away after his death, and is symbolically connected to the Holy Grail. All kinds of different folks, from a guy who claims to be the true king of Scotland to an elderly Japanese man from Aomori, assert that they are Jesus' descendant to this day. Even though most historians dispute the theory, that never stopped anybody from believing something, right?

Assassin's Creed says… Jesus totally had a descendent, but meh, she's not really worth talking about. Introduced in Assassin's Creed: Altair's Chronicles, Adha 'the Chalice' is the highly sought descendent of Jesus who will supposedly unite all warring factions of the world. Also, she's Altair's girlfriend. Unfortunately for Adha, Altair's Chronicles was terrible, so she was killed immediately and only grudgingly ever mentioned again.

The Philadelphia Experiment was real



The conspiracy: Science is just magic with numbers, a well-known fact to those who believe in the Philadelphia Project. In 1943, the U.S. government supposedly conducted experiments on the USS Eldridge in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, applying principles of unified field theory to turn the ship invisible. Because time machines or something. Researchers were supposedly able to make the Eldridge disappear, reappear in Virginia, and then go ten seconds back in time. Oh, and the first time they tried it, the ship reappeared with the crew embedded in her metal structure. And you thought you had a bad day at work.

Assassin's Creed says… The experiment totally happened under the Templars' orders, though the original conspiracy theory leaves out some details: the Eldridge actually went forward in time, stayed there for 18 minutes, and it's all thanks to a Piece of Eden. However, a company email shows that the Templar front group Abstergo Industries chose not to carry out any more experiments, due to the risk of creating time paradoxes. Well, somebody's genre-savvy!

The Illuminati is real, and it's run by the Knights Templar

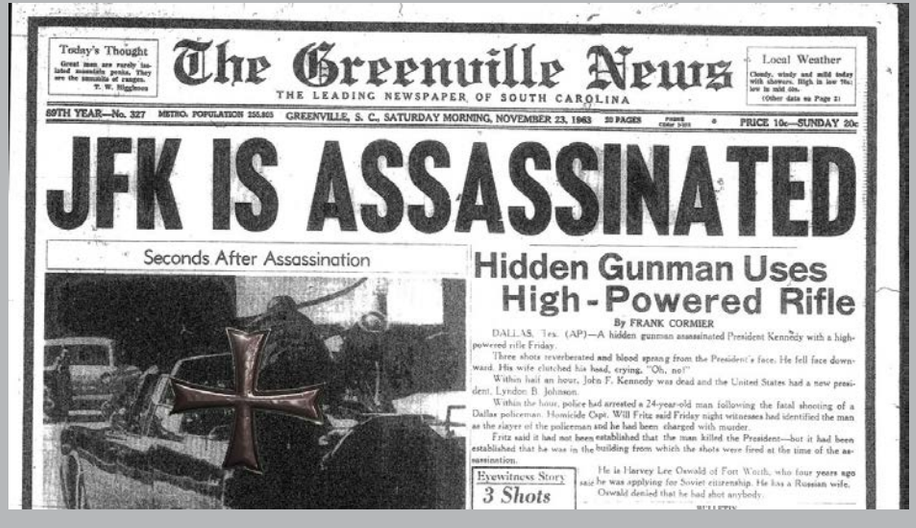
The conspiracy: You've probably heard of the Illuminati (the secret society said to quietly control the entire world) and the Illuminati has definitely heard of you. While the historical Bavarian Illuminati (a pretty benevolent secret society, really) was stomped out in 1785, that didn't stop it from becoming a legend. Theories emerged that the Illuminati was truly the Knights Templar in a new guise, and that it had regrouped as a Satan-worshipping fraternal cult set on world domination. Proof that it exists is apparently everywhere, from the all-seeing eye on the back of the dollar bill to Beyonce concert posters to nefarious cats sleeping in a triangle. Wake up world!

Assassin's Creed says… While the Illuminati is never specifically named, the Templars fit the bill precisely: descended from the Knights Templar, fraternal secret society, see everything, know everything, plans for world domination. The only thing standing between them and shooting a brainwashing mind-control orb into space are some parkour artists with shivs up their sleeves. Bet you couldn't tell that from folding a dollar in half!

Houdini was murdered

The conspiracy: According to the historical record, the death of Harry Houdini is fairly straightforward: he perished from inflammation of the abdominal lining and a ruptured appendix in October 1926. There is speculation that these medical issues were caused by a punch to the stomach from a fan, but that's not a particularly crazy notion, so it isn't good enough to some. As a result, a couple more conspiracy-friendly theories have cropped up, such as the suggestion that this was all planned out and Houdini was actually murdered. What anyone would murder him for is a mystery, but that's just part of the charm, right?

Assassin's Creed says… Houdini was killed by the Templars so they could get ahold of – wait for it – a Piece of Eden he carried. That's what allowed him to do his tricks (or fool people into thinking he was doing them, whichever) and expose mystics like he liked to do. His big crime was having something the Templars wanted, and they had plenty of resources to make his death look like an accident.


Today's Thought

Great men are rarely isolated mountain peaks. They are the summits of ranges.
T. W. Higginson

The Greenville News
THE LEADING NEWSPAPER OF SOUTH CAROLINA

Local Weather
Cloudy, windy and mild today with showers. High in low 70s; low in mid 40s.
(Other data on Page 2)

89TH YEAR—No. 327 METRO. POPULATION 255,803 GREENVILLE, S. C., SATURDAY MORNING, NOVEMBER 23, 1963 20 PAGES PRICE 10c—SUNDAY 20c

JFK IS ASSASSINATED

Seconds After Assassination

Hidden Gunman Uses High-Powered Rifle

By FRANK CORMIER

DALLAS, Tex. (AP)—A hidden gunman assassinated President Kennedy with a high-powered rifle Friday.

Three shots reverberated and blood sprang from the President's face. He fell face downward. His wife clutched his head, crying, "Oh, no!"

Within half an hour, John F. Kennedy was dead and the United States had a new president, Lyndon B. Johnson.

Within the hour, police had arrested a 24-year-old man following the fatal shooting of a Dallas policeman. Homicide Capt. Will Fritz said Friday night witnesses had identified the man as the slayer of the policeman and he had been charged with murder.

Fritz said it had not been established that the man killed the President—but it had been established that he was in the building from which the shots were fired at the time of the assassination.

Eyewitness Story
3 Shots

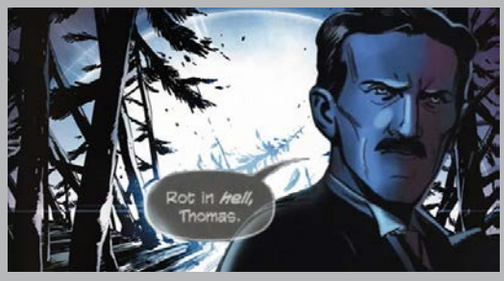
He is Harvey Lee Oswald of Fort Worth, who four years ago said he was applying for Soviet citizenship. He has a Russian wife.

Oswald denied that he had shot anybody.

There really was someone on the grassy knoll as a cover

The conspiracy: The assassination of JFK. This event is the focus of so many conspiracy theories they need their own Wikipedia page, and a majority of Americans believe at least one of them. To sum it up, a lot of people don't buy the official story that President Kennedy was killed by lone gunman Lee Harvey Oswald on November 22, 1963, but they disagree on which conspiracy theory to believe. Some say the mafia was involved, or the Soviets, or Kennedy's own Vice President - and there was definitely, definitely someone on that grassy knoll.

Assassin's Creed says… You're all wrong, because it's even crazier than that! Kennedy had something that the Templars wanted (hmm, I wonder what it could be), and they sent in their own extraction team to kill him and nab the prize. The group included Oswald, video-taker Abraham Zapruder, and Kennedy's own driver, who carried out the assassination and used a Piece of Eden to project a distraction onto - the grassy knoll. Well now, don't we all feel extra silly.



The Tunguska Event was an orchestrated disaster

The conspiracy: Duck and cover, this one's explosive. Back in June 1908, a mysterious object detonated in the center of Russia, leveling over 800 miles of forest in what is now known as the Tunguska Event. The explosion was supposedly caused by a meteor, but not everyone bought that story, so conspiracy theories have cropped up to explain what really happened. Maybe it was aliens, or secret bomb testing, or time-traveling aliens, or a black hole, or anti-matter, or other science-y stuff. Heck, some people even think Nikola Tesla did it! Haha, how silly!

Assassin's Creed says... Nikola Tesla did it. With a giant death ray on top of Wardenclyffe Tower. Because fuck Thomas Edison. It seems that in 1908, the Templars got ahold of yet another Piece of Eden and took it to a research facility near the Podkamennaya Tunguska River. Assassins approached Tesla, who at that point had been financially ruined by Templars like Edison, and asked him to use his tower's wireless power transmission to destroy the facility. Destroy it he did, but not before getting in one last dig. Well, who can blame him?

Rasputin brainwashed people with black magic

The conspiracy: Did you have a section in your school history class about the Russian Revolution? Do you watch the History Channel? Have you played Just Dance? Then you've heard of this guy. Healer to the Russian Prince Alexei during the early 20th century and crazy eyes extraordinaire, Rasputin exerted an impressive degree of control over the Russian royal family. Some even say Rasputin wasn't just a healer, but a mystic who mentally controlled the Tsarina to worm his way into power. Also, he was really, really hard to kill, and after being poisoned, shot, beaten and thrown in a river, he died of drowning. Probably.

Assassin's Creed says... That's all true, but Rasputin didn't do it on his own. A covert Templar agent, he infiltrated the Russian royal palace under the guise of healing Alexei and stole the Imperial Sceptre, which was totally normal and in no way magical. Just kidding, it was a Piece of Eden, which Rasputin used to heal, control minds, and survive brutal injury. Like his intestines falling out. Eugh.

Hitler escaped his bunker, but he didn't get far

The conspiracy: There are those out there that found Hitler's suicide in his military bunker in April 1945 to be anticlimactic or, at the very least, unbelievable. It's not uncommon for people to be skeptical about the death of a horrible tyrant without physical proof, and not surprising how quickly conspiracy theories of his escape cropped up. The most popular claim is that the bodies found in the bunker were doubles and that he and Eva Braun bailed for South America. Their destination is disputed – one book published in the '60s says Argentina, and a dissertation that hit the news in 2014 says Brazil – but the theory is the same: Hitler slipped right past the Allied forces without anyone being the wiser. Hmm...

Assassin's Creed says... Hitler did try to escape, but don't worry, he didn't get far. As it turns out, the Assassins didn't like him much, and were all too happy to find his bunker and dispense justice while he was on his way out. You're welcome, world.

The world was going to end in December 2012

The conspiracy: Ah, the '2012 phenomenon'. Like Y2K on steroids. According to conspiracy theorists with questionable archeological backgrounds, the Mayan calendar predicted the world would end or change cataclysmically on December 21, 2012, because that's when the calendar ended. Despite the fact that that's not how calendars work, the theory held strong until the fateful date, when everyone went about their business and the world quietly failed to end.

Assassin's Creed says... It was totally going to happen, because solar flares! One was going to mess up the polarity of Earth and cook the planet's surface, and only a portion of humanity would survive. Thankfully the creators of humankind built a reality altering machine (just go with it) that could protect Earth at the critical moment, and wouldn't you know it, Desmond was there to use the thing! He died in the process, but the planet was saved and the devs got to kill off a character they didn't want to deal with anymore. Everyone wins.

Human evolution was altered by alien intelligence... sort of

The conspiracy: This one's so old and so well known, it gets a fancy sounding name: the ancient astronaut hypothesis. It says that a race of intelligent extraterrestrial beings visited Earth and vastly altered the trajectory of homo sapiens. Apparently everything from Egyptian pyramids to human genetic code exists because of smarty-pants aliens playing fast and loose with our evolution. It even suggests that what we now think of as gods were those alien visitors, it's just that we were still chewing rocks at the time and didn't know the difference.

Assassin's Creed says... This exactly! Except they were here first and we were their cattle. A telepathic humanoid species known as the First Civilization, humanity's creators needed a bigger workforce to support their society. So, they took some unsuspecting apes, molded the creatures in their own image, and humanity was born! Except those early humans got tired of being slaves, rebelled against their creators, and built new societies on the ruins left behind after the struggle. Call it our species' rebellious teen stage.

HEY, REMEMBER THAT TIME YOU FOUND A GIANT SEA MONSTER IN ASSASSIN'S CREED?

We speak to Ubisoft about the (literally) biggest secret in the whole series

While Assassin's Creed has always been a fairly serious series, it's no stranger to Easter eggs. While you can read about all the cool in-jokes and secrets later in this magazine, we actually reached out to Ubisoft to learn about the most famous…

"I was a game designer on Assassin's Creed II, and I wasn't aware of it," says Jean Guesdon, Creative Director on Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag at Ubisoft Montreal. "It was an Easter Egg created by Singapore. It was the first collaboration, and Singapore made all the Assassin's Tombs. Some of the Montreal studio went to Singapore to start the studio – they were made up of people who created PoP Sands of Time and the first Assassin's Creed – and they created that Easter egg in secrecy."

He's talking about the giant squid that you can find in the Santa Maria della Visitazione Assassin's Tomb in Venice, if you peer into the water for a few seconds. This Easter egg is something that very few members of the Assassin's Creed II team were even aware of until it started popping up in videos on YouTube.

"A few of the experts we brought over for ACII had previously worked in Montreal on AC and Prince of Persia: Sands of Time," says Karl Luhe, Associate Producer at Ubisoft Singapore. "It was a long-running joke with ACII script writer, Corey May, that he wanted to have a giant squid in one of his games, but had never made it happen before. So we decided to slip that into one of our Assassin's Tomb levels. Montreal knew about it before it was released, but they didn't know we were working on it. It was quite fun. We created it as a bug, sent it over to them and asked them to check it out, and they immediately got the joke and everyone enjoyed it."

TOP
There are plenty of sea creatures in Black Flag, but only one giant squid

ABOVE
Here's the giant squid as seen in one of the Assassin's Tombs in ACII

There is, sadly, no historical precidence for any giant squid being sighted in renaissance Italy. They're mainly restricted to North Atlantic waters around Norway and Sweden, fact fans. Still, it's a cool Easter egg nonetheless, and one that was nodded to again in Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag.

Really, you didn't spot it? Head to the wreck of the Antocha, and go inside the sunken ship. Now, peer out of the window and you'll see the squid appear and start fighting with a sperm whale. So not only is this a cool Easter egg… it's a recurring one.

SINGAPORE

ANNECY

MONTREAL

THE SUM OF ITS PARTS...

Andy Hartup investigates the fascinating, complex process of making one Assassin's Creed game across several teams, spread all over the world. This is how the games get made every year

LEFT
Black Flag was one of Ubisoft's most ambitious multi-team projects

RIGHT
Ubisoft Annecy has been responsible for the multiplayer in most AC games to date

BELOW
Ubi Singapore first came up with the naval concept, which dominated Black Flag

This game was made by a multicultural team of various faiths and beliefs'. This message, which runs at the start of every Assassin's Creed game, started out as a convenient disclaimer for the sensitive subject matter of the original game. After all the conflict between the Christian and Muslim faiths is often headline news. However, since then it has grown to explain so much more about Assassin's Creed. Each entry in the series now has six or seven separate studios working on the same game from all corners of the globe. Now, that opening screen is more boast than disclaimer, and quite rightly so. Each iteration in the series can be described as some of the most ambitious global projects in games.

That's why we decided to dig deeper into how the epic Assassin's Creed games actually get made year after year. Sure, some games use a couple of studios to spread the work-load, but when you're putting together a jigsaw that has its pieces scattered across Canada, France, eastern Europe, and even Singapore, it becomes a challenge just to keep track of everything, let alone meet deadlines and release a coherent game. To find out how it's done, we chatted to several people from the Montreal, Annecy and Singapore studios.

Seven. That's the number of studios working on Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag. Montreal is the base, the creative nerve centre, while studios like Ubisoft Singapore work on the naval combat sections and Ubisoft Annecy craft the multiplayer. What's the advantage to working like this? Manpower. Jean Guesdon, Creative Director on Assassin's Creed 4: Black Flag at Ubisoft Montreal, explains: "When you give a mandate to a different studio, you know they're really going to focus on that specific thing. When you're working as just a single team or even two studios, there's a tendency to focus on fewer things to make sure your game gets finished. However, when we spread the content out like we do, to our different studios, features that might be considered optional or secondary become a priority to that studio. So that's great for the overall game."

By spreading responsibility for the varied features in the game, Ubisoft can afford to make Assassin's Creed so diverse. We so often hear development teams say 'We'd love to do co-op, but we have to focus on getting our story right' or 'Yes, spectator mode would be awesome, but we didn't have time to make it'. By allowing teams like Ubisoft Singapore to create the naval battles in Assassin's Creed 3, Montreal was free to focus on the rest of the game--safe in the knowledge that the naval battles would be up to standard, because it was the sole responsibility for an entire studio. >>

Not only that, if studios really nail the aspect of the game that they're working on, it can have a huge impact on the future of the series. Take naval combat for example--Black Flag is built around the idea of sailing and sea warfare, something an associate studio created for AC3.

"It's a great accolade for us," explains Karl Luhe, Associate Producer at Ubisoft Singapore. "With AC3 we really went for it and tried to create something new. Throughout our collaboration with Montreal we've really been building our team and our skills, and with the naval warfare it was pretty clear early on that we'd made something special. So, when it was decided between the studios that Black Flag would have a larger naval component, that was something we were very proud of."

> WHEN UBISOFT FIRST SHOWED NAVAL WARFARE AT E3 2012 EVERYONE IN THE CROWD WAS REALLY BLOWN AWAY

It comes as no surprise, given the reaction that other Assassin's Creed studios had when they first saw the naval warfare in AC3. "When Ubisoft first showed naval warfare at E3 2012, everyone in the crowd was really surprised by it and blown away," says Damien Kieken, Game Director at Ubisoft Annecy. "We had the exact same reaction a couple of months before E3 when they showed it to us as a gameplay sequence, via the newsletter. Everyone was like 'That's amazing'."

Each studio working on the series receives a weekly newsletter, showing off the work being done by everyone else. The content depends on what is happening that week. Sometimes it's a slick video put together by marketing, sometimes it's a screen-share from a developer, sometimes it's concept art or text. Either way, it's a great way to showcase and share ideas to make sure everyone is working towards the same goals.

However, a newsletter isn't enough. At Ubisoft Montreal, there's an entire team dedicated to coordinating the studios. "The biggest challenge with Assassin's Creed development is to make sure the vision and the priorities are the same all over the globe," explains Ambre Lizurey, Production Manager at Ubisoft Montreal. "When you work in Montreal and you have the creative direction in one place, it's easy to walk over to a colleague and ask for some details on a specific aspect of the game. However, when you're 20 hours away and have a huge time difference, like the team in Singapore, getting immediate answers is a real difficulty. That's why we created a dedicated team in Montreal to make sure that every studio has someone to ask questions to, and get the answers they need."

With Ubisoft Montreal taking the lead on all Assassin's Creed games (Montreal was the only developer on the original game), they ultimately have the final word on whether something is included or not. Does it cause conflict when an associate studio wants to include something, but Montreal doesn't see a place for it (and vice versa)? "This will always happen," says Guesdon. "It happens in every project, even when people are sharing the same floor. It isn't a specific issue that happens when you're working with multiple studios. It requires the same sort of problem solving - a lot of talk, and getting people around the table to sort out differences."

CREED UNITY

And has it ever happened? We asked Singapore and Annecy if they'd ever had great ideas cut by Montreal. "We're always pretty much aligned with Montreal about where we want to go," says Luhe, speaking for Singapore studio. "It's never a case of them bringing down a big hammer and saying 'No, your idea is never going to work'."

In fact, it often works the other way around. Associate studios will often inspire others to try something new. After seeing the naval warfare sections created by Singapore, the Annecy studio started working out how to

integrate it into multiplayer. "It's the natural reaction – you see it and think 'Hey, that'd be really cool in multiplayer," says Kieken. "However, when we looked deeper into it we came up against many obstacles like how to replicate the physics of the water. The water, for example, is a gameplay tool – it behaves differently, it has physics, you can have rogue waves and things like that. So, it's something that would need to be replicated perfectly for all players in multiplayer. That throws up all kinds of issues technically and in terms of game design, so it's one of the things that was studied carefully and dropped."

Shame, but with the untapped power of PS4 and Xbox One, this could be a feature we see in the future. It's all a matter of teamwork and solving the problems. Guesdon reflects on the process: "Creating a game is hard. Creating a game when you've got multiple teams around the world is even harder. But I think we're doing a pretty decent job with Assassin's Creed. We use as many channels of communication as possible, we use networks, video calls, physical visits. It's not easy, but as long as you have good people, then anything is possible. It makes me feel that Assassin's Creed – as a game – is much greater than the sum of its parts."

TOP
Black Flag was the first investigation into Assassin's Creed's potential on PS and XO

ABOVE
Eventually, Annecy wants to be able to have multiplayer naval battles

LEFT
Teams occasionally disagree, but Montreal keeps everyone in line

MEMORY/SECRETDATA/01

The Animus

Built by Abstergo Industries, the Animus is rather handily able to access the genetic memories of a human being via their DNA. It projects the memories of these ancestors into a 3D world that can then be explored. Originally using Abstergo's 1.0 model in ACI, Desmond was later plugged into the updated 2.0 developed by the Assassins. Synching with an ancestor isn't easy, though – finding a point that doesn't cause too much stress is a difficult task, and synchronization isn't without its side-effects. Desmond's predecessor, Subject 16, was over-exposed, leaving permanent psychological damage and his mind stuck floating in the Animus. Oh, and that's not a loading screen as you enter a level: it's called the White Room, and it makes your segue into the Animus a much calmer experience.

The Animus is also used for training Abstergo agents. Cue the excellent multiplayer option.
Once seated, the subject puts on a cerebral transmitter.
Are you sitting comfortably? Then the mind-bending procedure will commence.

SECRETS OF THE ANIMUS

New to Assassin's? Get up to speed with this intel

MEMORY/SECRETDATA/03

2012

The Mayan-predicted end of the Earth was a serious threat to Desmond and co. A solar flare was predicted to wipe out humanity on 21 December, just as it previously did to Those Who Came Before. Thankfully, Desmond chooses to make the ultimate sacrifice in Assassin's Creed III to save the world, and rid it of his rather annoying, whiny interactions with his father.

MEMORY/SECRETDATA/02

Assassins

A worldwide secret organisation dedicated to preserving mankind's freedom of choice, the Assassins believe in the betterment of society via the development of individuals. This is directly in opposition to the Templars, who are happy to keep us plebs in check. During the Medieval era, the Assassins became a recognised faction based in Masyaf. Throughout the ages, Assassins have been constantly repressed by the Templars, but continue to work diligently to protect freedom.

MEMORY/SECRETDATA/04

Templars

The Templars – also known as the Order Of The Knights Templar (or the Bad Guys) – crave control over society. At odds with the beliefs of the Assassins, they hold the conviction that society will only reach its full potential when manipulated by the wishes of a powerful few. The creation of Abstergo Industries as the public face of the Templars meant that scientific research could be done without arousing suspicion, and the development of the Animus could begin. With the control they offer the bearer, Pieces Of Eden are the equivalent of catnip to them.

MEMORY/SECRETDATA/05

Eagle Vision

Genetically inherited, Eagle Vision is an extra-sensory ability that gives an increased awareness of surroundings. It is suggested that the trait comes as a byproduct of a cross between the First Civilization and humans. It's possessed by both Ezio and Altair, and was transferred to Desmond after intense exposure to the Animus. Improving through practice, Eagle Vision can be used to identify threats and hiding spots, as well as the location of Glyphs.

MEMORY/SECRETDATA/06

Bleeding Effect

As well as experiencing the activities of ancestors, extended use of the Animus can also lead to a sharing of skills and talents. As Desmond journeys further through the life of Ezio Auditore he develops handy free-running abilities and combat skills – although thankfully not a dodgy Italian accent. However, he slowly starts to confuse his memories, and visions of those long dead haunt his mind but also often helpfully point him in the right direction.

MEMORY/SECRETDATA/07

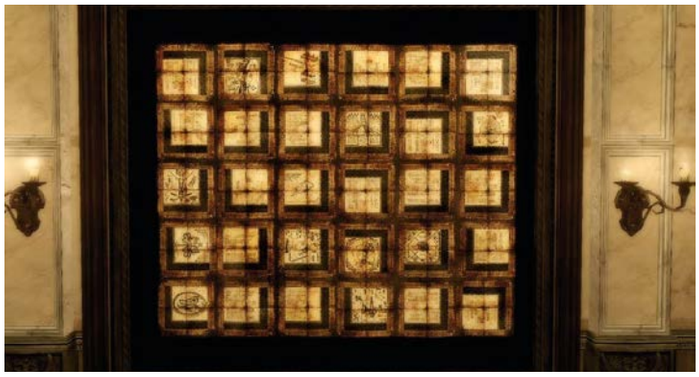
Those Who Came Before

Little is known of this advanced race that once lived on Earth alongside humans, and their pioneering technology is all that's left. They developed Pieces Of Eden in order to suppress humans and ensure their obedience, and it's suggested that they also had six senses – the sixth being advanced knowledge of space and time. They were wiped out by a solar flare, but continued to speak from the past to Ezio and Desmond in order to prevent the same catastrophe happening once again in 2012. Great success!

MEMORY/SECRETDATA/08

The Codex

Written by Altair, the Codex is part memoir and part history of the Assassins. It also holds an embedded map of a series of temples scattered across the globe. Ezio recovers its pages and pieces them together during ACII, using them for the redesign of the hidden blade.



MEMORY/SECRETDATA/09

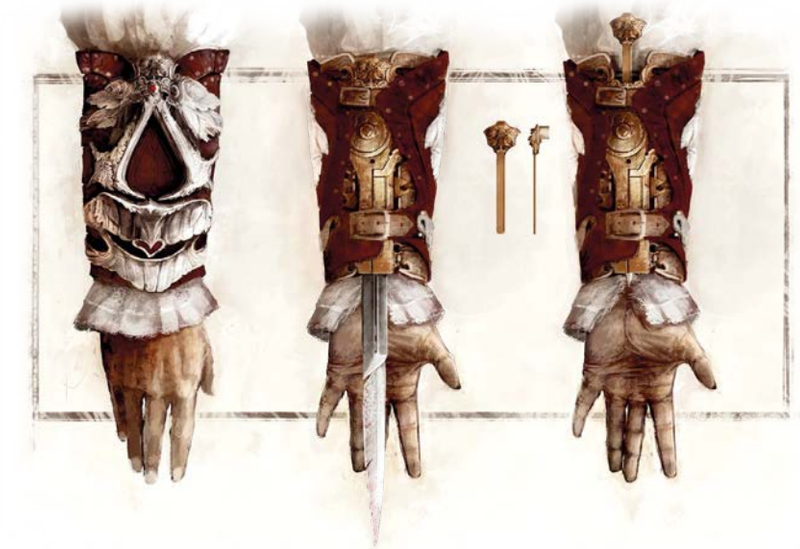
Pieces Of Eden

Created with the superior technology of Those Who Came Before, these devices were built with the sole purpose of manipulating human physiology. They're coveted by the Templars for the control and power that they offer – which is why the Assassins need to intercept them. Apples Of Eden are items of the same nature that can also function as storage devices for information. Who needs USB drives, hmm?

MEMORY/SECRETDATA/10

Hidden blade

The iconic weapon of the Brotherhood, the wearing of a hidden blade is the sign of a true Assassin. A three-part retractable blade inside a leather bracer, it's worn on the left arm and allows for stealthy yet deadly combat. Initiation once involved the removal of the ring finger in order for the blade to naturally replace it but this was changed to a ceremonial branding. Thankfully, too, if you were attached to your digits. The mechanism has been tweaked throughout the ages, but the blade remains a seriously stabby tool.



MEMORY/SECRETDATA/11

The Truth

Unlocked after you've found all of the Glyphs and solved their puzzles in ACII, The Truth is a video showing what looks like the escape of Adam and Eve from a futuristic complex with an Apple Of Eden.

CURIOSITIES OF THE CREED

Secrets, Easter eggs, and in-jokes from the Assassin's Creed universe

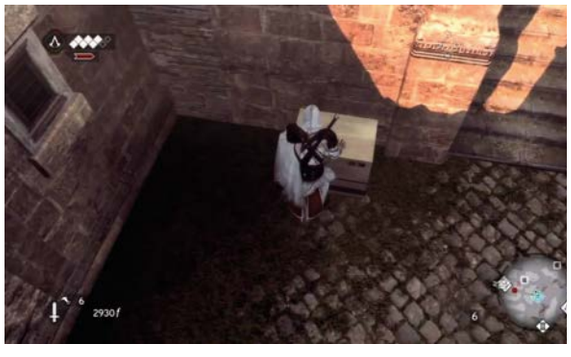
In its eight year history, Assassin's Creed has taken us to amazing places. From medieval Jerusalem to Industrial Revolution London, from Renaissance Rome to Revolutionary Paris, this is gaming's most imaginative playground. Ubisoft has become a master of world building in this time, too, and as well as filling its cities with vast numbers of activities, from assassinations to investigations, chases, its fair share of tailing and more. These game worlds also hide a swathe of incredible secrets up their sleeves. Here are just a few of our favourites...

Nintendo

There are a huge number of nods to iconic video games throughout Assassin's Creed history. Perhaps most notably, Ubisoft's knowledge and admiration of Nintendo's legacy comes through on several occasions. The most overtly unsubtle of these is in Assassin's Creed II, when master assassin Ezio Auditore's uncle enters the room, exclaiming "It's a me, Mario!" – a homage to the most famous red plumber on Earth. Elsewhere, in 2010's Brotherhood, the game's lengthy list of achievements had further treats; Principessa in Another Castello is a reference to the the early Mario games, referencing the message you get when the little Italian battles through Bowser's forts.

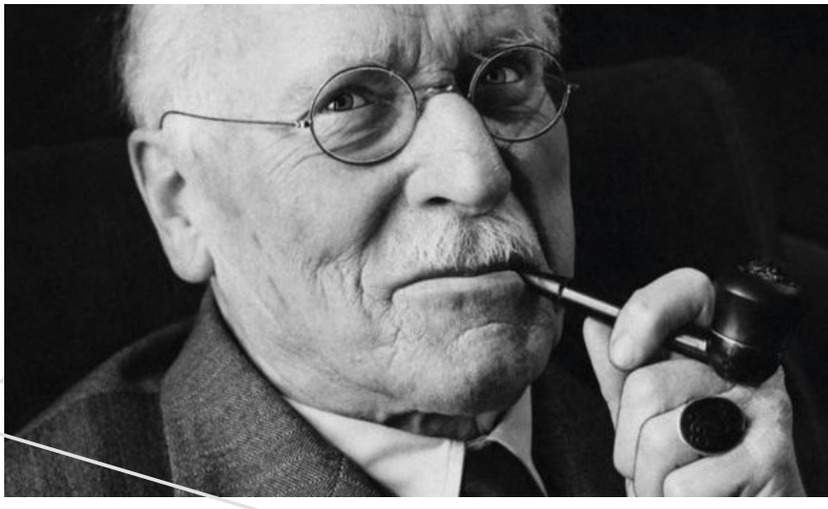
Giant Squid vs Big Whale

Black Flag's Caribbean pirate setting was perfect for aquatic spectacle. In Black Flag, you could dive deep to a particular wreck in the Caribbean seas to explore a sunken ship. While swimming through the inside of the hull, you'll trigger a short cinematic cutscene as you peer through the small porthole windows, where a huge whale and a giant squid will start battling each other for underwater domination.



Carl Jung

Carl Jung, one of the most influential figures in the study of psychology, makes many appearances in the Assassin's Creed series. The Animus, the futuristic sci-fi machine used to utilise DNA of long-dead ancestors to make really cool Oculus-esque augmented realities, is named after Jung's study of the anima and the animus – the two main archetypes of the unconscious human mind. A few characters in the game, like Eve and Maria Auditore, share their forenames with stages of Carl Jung's study of anima development, which represent the inner femininity in a male mind. It's all very complicated, but trust us when we say that this guy is clearly a basis of the theory behind Abstergo's cerebral experiments.



Other Video Games

As you might expect, the gaming references don't stop with Nintendo. In Brotherhood alone you'll find alludes to Castle Crashers and Grand Theft Auto, with a memory sequence called 'Castello Crasher' and the achievement 'Grand Theft Dressage'. Then, Metal Gear Solid's iconic cardboard box disguise gets featured as Ezio meets Leonardo Da Vinci. It's quick, as Ezio speedily looks away, but the anachronism of a modern storage device in renaissance Rome sticks out like a sore thumb. More overt references are made in Black Flag, with the missions 'Tomb Raiders' and the naval contract 'Papers, Please'.

>>

Transformers

In the city of Damascus, in the original Assassin's Creed game, you can find visual nods to the autobot's big-cheese, Optimus Prime. It's only a very subtle detail on a few particular buildings throughout the city, that only the most devout fans of Transformers would likely pick up on, but once you see it, you can't unsee.

Cats

Assassin's Creed Unity didn't have the strongest of releases when it came out in 2014, but you can't argue that its interpretation of the bloody conflict of the French Revolution, mixed with the beauty of Paris - the world's most romantic city - is a stunning proposition. It's also home to one of our favourite Easter eggs - a very small boat hidden deep in the Saint Marcel district. In it, you'll find a raving madman, a couple of dead bodies and almost two dozen little purring cats. Marvellous.

Desmond Miles

Spoiler warning if you don't know, but Desmond Miles pops his sorry time-travelling clogs at the end of Assassin's Creed III, something which pleased many people who weren't huge fans of the futuristic portions of the games. However, just because the poor guy sacrificed his life trying to save the world, doesn't mean he's gone from the series for good. There were rumours, early on, that Desmond may return, but in Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag, you're able to dive into data files to unearth the secrets about Subject 17 – Desmond himself – to confirm that he was harvested for DNA postmortem, to preserve key information from his genetic code. Interesting stuff, if a little ghoulish.

The IT Crowd

As the Assassin's Creed series got more and more meta, placing you as an employee in the modern incarnation of Abstergo, the references to other iconic offices also came through, including that of the small-time but classic comedy, The IT Crowd. In Black Flag, while taking a break from all the pillaging in the Caribbean seas by exploring the comparatively unexotic Abstergo offices, you can overhear two smalltime employees talking about the "arrogant" John from the IT department downstairs, who, whenever they call him for help, smugly asks them if they've tried "turning it off and on again".

Hollywood

Any game series has its fair share of Hollywood inspirations, but the Assassin's Creed series loves them. In Revelations, the memory 'The Spy Who Shunned Me' is a play on the James Bond film, 'The Spy Who Loved Me' (we're still waiting for 'Skyfall Off A Tall Building' and 'Assassino Royale') while Assassin's Creed: Liberation's achievement, 'Predator' – earned by killing an enemy from a tree using a blowpipe, while enabling Eagle Vision – is inspired by the film of the same name, in which the titular hunters hide in trees, using thermal imaging to kill their enemies unseen... hey, you've seen it, we know.

In Black Flag, there are references to Inglorious Bastards – one of Edward Kenway's memories is called 'Vainglorious Bastards' – as well as the line "pick up your socks and grab your cocks" from pirate John Cockram. This is a direct quote from the 1980s classic, Full Metal Jacket. As Ubisoft got more and more meta with its modern day depiction of Abstergo, the references diversified into more and more unique allusions. In Assassin's Creed Unity, you can access a list of pun-tastic Abstergo Entertainment products, including "Fear and Loathing in Florence," based on the adventures of Ezio Auditore himself.

Superheroes

Ubisoft clearly loves superheroes. In Assassin's Creed: Revelations, Marvel's Peter Parker is the inspiration for the achievement 'Spider Assassin', earned by climbing to the top of the Hagia Sophia - the basilica in Constantinople - in under 25-seconds. Meanwhile, characters from the DC universe show up, too. In the Animus Training Program in Revelations, one of the test programs is called Man of Steel, while in Assassin's Creed II you can overhear passers-by looking at you scaling walls and saying "another caped crusader", which, if you know comic books, is Batman.

TALKING SHAUN

As he reprises his role for yet another AC game, we catch up with Danny Wallace, who plays Assassin historian Shaun Hastings, and talk Templars, TV, and fame

Danny Wallace is best know for the fact that he presented this year's Golden Joystick Awards. Ahem. Well, his books (Yes Man, Friends Like These) have shifted a few copies too. In Syndicate he's reprised his role as historian Shaun Hastings; a character who we first saw way back in Assassin's Creed II. We caught up with the man Wikipedia describes as 'a humourist' to chat about games.

Was the original part of Shaun written for you in ACII or did you make it the way it is?

No, it wasn't written for me, but a very nice man at Ubisoft who likes my stuff thought I might be able to do it, so he made the case for me and they gave me a go. I went in, read it all out, and before I knew it I was in. They gave me a script and I improvise around it, though obviously they only use the stuff they actually like. There are many lines I made up that were clearly not appropriate for a widely-released video game.

Did you deliberately make Shaun more abrasive for Brotherhood and beyond?

If he's more abrasive it's because the producers wanted him that way. They'd write the lines and outline the attitude and then I'd add whatever I added to it. But it's not like I'd waltz in and start changing things and saying 'I think Shaun would do it this way' because they know exactly where they want things to go, and I just want to help.

What do you think is the general perception of gaming in the TV industry?

The problem, I think, used to be that gamers would be married – more or less – to one console or platform, and you gave that platform your loyalty. I was a Mega Drive boy. My neighbour preferred the SNES. You had one or the other because your parents would only let you buy one or the other. So gaming TV would ultimately be a little fruitless because maybe only five or six minutes of each episode would be relevant to you and the rest would be dull. Now, though, gamers are older and more savvy, they have more cash, they have more than one machine to play on. Plus games are released on different machines so TV reviews are more relevant to the wider public than ever before. I think TV is yet to realise this properly – there's an idea that it has to be camp like GamesMaster or kiddie like Bad Influence. In fact everything has moved on light years.

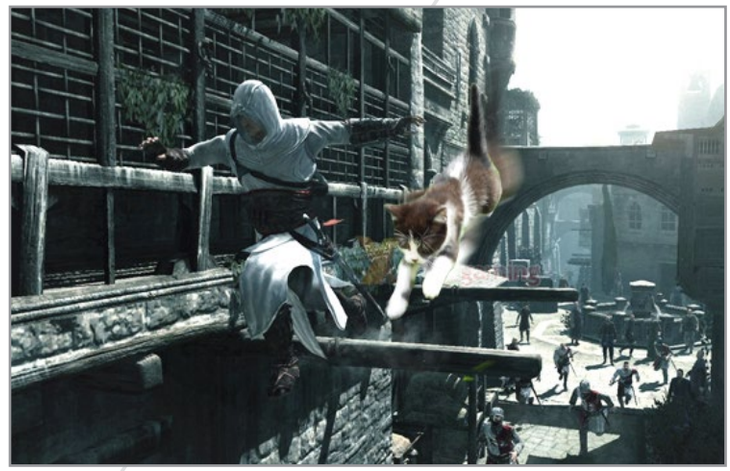
When people meet you, what do they remember you for? Would you rather be that bloke from the book, the chap who writes for Shortlist, or that guy from Assassin's Creed?

I mainly get recognised for my books or documentaries, or for the film Yes Man. Once, in America, a man recognised my voice as that of the bloke from Assassin's Creed II, which was a very odd moment for me, but fun. Luckily, he had no problem with Shaun's abrasive behaviour, else I could have been smacked in the face that day.

AND FINALLY... 9 REASONS ASSASSIN'S CREED IS SECRETLY A GAME ABOUT CATS

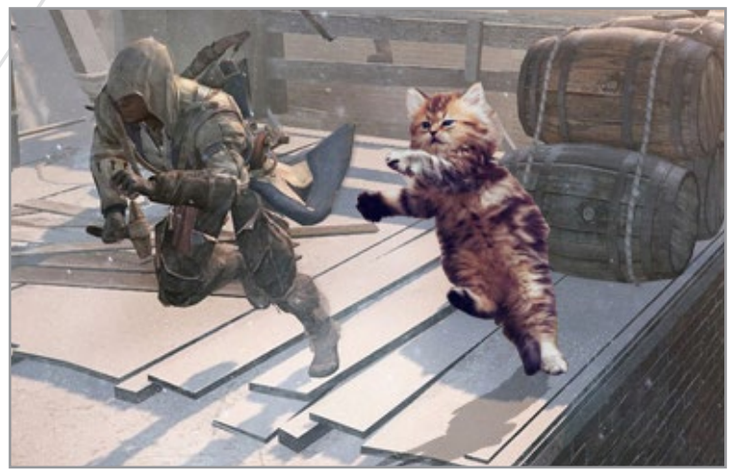
We investigatethe mysteries of the Ani-mouse

Seriously. We know you don't believe us yet, but seriously. We came to this astounding realisation a couple of days ago and immediately knew that we had to share it with you. In Assassin's Creed, you are not playing an ancestral murder-man. You are playing a reskinned cat. All of the series' core mechanics and tropes are based upon well documented feline behaviour. Assassin's Creed is simply an urban cat simulator that they redressed as a historical conspiracy epic in order to maximise its commercial chances. Still don't believe us? Read on and we'll explain.



IT'S ABOUT USING PARKOUR AS YOUR DEFAULT MODE OF TRAVEL, AND BEING FAR TOO AGILE FOR YOUR OWN GOOD

Because why go from A to B when you can go via F, Z, K, U and E?



IT'S ABOUT FRANTICALLY RUNNING AWAY WHEN YOUR CAREFUL, METICULOUSLY PLANNED STEALTHY APPROACH SUDDENLY GOES TO

From predatory ninja to scrambling prey in the blink of an eye.

IT'S ABOUT HAVING A PHYSICAL AVERSION TO WATER

At least in the first one. Assassins got better at all things water after the middle-ages. Cats didn't.

IT'S ABOUT CLIMBING ON TOP OF THE HIGHEST THING IN THE AREA
Being on top of a thing means that you have conquered that thing and are now safe from all things that are smaller than your thing.

IT'S ABOUT CAUSING A RUCKUS AND NONCHALANTLY WALKING AWAY LIKE IT WASN'T YOUR FAULT
"What? Me? Nah" "WHAT?"

IT'S ABOUT RETRACTABLE CLAWS
Rumour has it that cats had a full set of fingers until they had these fitted. Take that, dual hidden-blade...

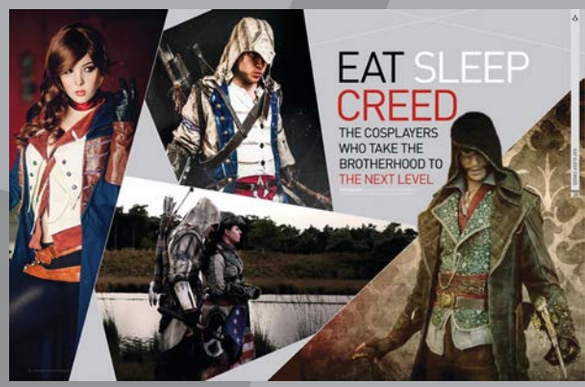
IT'S ABOUT RANDOMLY STICKING INNOCENT PASSERS-BY WITH PRECISELY ZERO PROVOCATION
Because you've got to stay sharp for when it actually matters.

IT'S ABOUT COLLECTING FEATHERS
Well, the Ezio games certainly are. Unlike cats, though, Assassins don't have to dump them on their friends' kitchen floor at breakfast.

WHITE (CLAD) CATS CAN JUMP
Mind blown? Entire perception of one of gaming's biggest franchises lying in tatters around the floor? Thought so.

AC SYNDICATE REVIEWED
Our verdict on the best Assassin's Creed in years

EVERY ASSASSIN EVER
An exhaustive list of the entire Assassin order



EAT SLEEP CREED
Take a look at the most amazing, dedicated AC cosplay

ASSASSIN'S CREED'S SECRETS
Ubisoft reveals the series' biggest, most exciting secrets

GOLDEN JOYSTICK PRESENTS

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